

Bedouin, Settlers, and Holiday-Makers

Egypt's Changing Northwest Coast



Donald P. Cole
Soraya Altorki

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The American University in Cairo Press

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Front cover: A *SPOT* satellite image covering part of the Egyptian northwest coast, showing 'Ajiba and its surroundings.

Back cover: A *SPOT* satellite image of Marsa Matruh.

The images were produced by *GeoMAP Consultants - Egypt* using Canadian *PCI EASI / PACE* software. The image was acquired by the French *SPOT* satellite in 1991.

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PREFACE

We are an Arabian woman and an American man, and also anthropologists who met in the 1960s as graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley. We now work as colleagues at the American University in Cairo (AUC), where Cole has taught since 1971 and Altorki since 1977. Moreover, we separately pioneered modern social anthropological research in Saudi Arabia, as Cole studied the Al Murrah Bedouin in the arid ranges of the Empty Quarter and Eastern Province in 1968–70 and Altorki first conducted research in 1971–73 among elite families of the urban community of Jiddah in the Hijaz or Western Province (Cole 1975; Altorki 1986).

In the mid-1980s we decided to work jointly to study change and development in Saudi Arabia as that process had unfolded in a specific community; and thus in 1986–87 we conducted fieldwork in 'Unayzah, a small city and oasis in the Qasim region of Najd, Saudi Arabia's arid central province. That research showed the ancient existence of complex organization in desert Arabia, where urban-based markets had linked nomadic pastoralist production, sedentary farming, and craft work into common exchange systems at the level of local regions. These markets had also organized long-distance trade which tied Arabia's regions to other parts of the world. For 'Unayzah and the region of Qasim, these other parts of the world were mainly greater Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and western India.

Our work documented the gradual decline of Arabia's old political economy during the first three or four decades of the twentieth century, as the introduction of new technologies and the rise of the contemporary Sa'udi state brought significant change. A period of change that we characterized as *substantive* development took place during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. However, the boom that resulted from Saudi Arabia's acquisition of large amounts of revenue from the sale of oil beginning in the mid-1970s brought change of transformational proportions: a major expansion of new agriculture in the desert; a massive construction of new housing and physical infrastructure; a rapid expansion in education and occupational change for men and women; and a vast importation of expatriate workers, consumer items, and machines and their spare parts. This transformation brought high standards of living to most of the local population; but we questioned the sustainability of many aspects of the change and posited that the boom had marked a truncation of many of the development achievements which had preceded it (Altorki and Cole 1989; Cole and Altorki 1992, 1993).

The present study continues the joint work we began in 'Unayzah; but the location this time is the arid ranges, dryland farming areas, desert beaches, and small provincial capital of the Matruh governorate in Egypt's northwest coastal zone. Many differences exist between communities in central Arabia and those in northwest Egypt. 'Unayzah, for example, is more *hadar*, "urban," and the northwest coast more *badiya*, "Bedouin." Yet the overall process of change in both areas demonstrates many similarities despite different local histories and economic specificities, and important parallels exist between the two cases. Moreover, change underway in the northwest coast is more than just a local regional phenomenon within the governorate of Matruh. The transformation there is part of processes that, in some instances, are specifically related to Egypt's national political economy and, in others, more generally to development in similar desert regions of the wider Arab world.

Our selection of Egypt's northwest coast as the location of this study is the result of a combination of personal, practical, and academic or scientific factors—as is probably the case for most research projects. The Arabian Peninsula will always occupy a special place in our minds and hearts, but we have also long wanted to conduct academic research in the Egypt that has provided us with employment and with residences that have become homes for each of us. The exquisite beauty of the sea and the many excellent beaches in this part of Egypt, quite frankly, also enticed us to the area. Marsa Matruh, the region's administrative capital, is an easy drive of about five hours by car or bus from Cairo, and we could readily travel there for shorter and longer durations of fieldwork. Also, we had previously spent individual holidays in the area, and each has nostalgias that go back twenty and more years and provide us with personal links to the northwest coast.

Of major practical importance is that a high ranking state official encouraged our research and indicated that, with proper introductions from AUC, we would be welcomed in the region. An academic factor that strongly influenced our selection of the area is the existence of an excellent body of anthropological research on important aspects of development and change there in the 1960s. Ahmed M. Abou-Zeid conducted an ethnographic survey throughout the region during the summer of 1964 and wrote perceptively of the development of trade, the introduction of local cooperative societies, problems of local leadership and state-tribe relationships, the organization and activities of the World Food Program (one of the region's first international development projects), and of changes in agriculture and range production (Abou-Zeid nd). He also produced insightful analyses of the growth of Marsa Matruh and of sedentarization and other changes among the nomads (Abou-Zeid 1965, 1968, 1979).

Gerald J. Obermeyer spent a year of doctoral research between June 1964 and May 1965 in the al-Qasr area, located a few kilometers to the west of Marsa Matruh. His dissertation provides a detailed ethnography of the ‘Ashaibat clan of the Awlad ‘Ali al-Aḥmar tribe in Qasr and is complete with genealogies and maps of lineage territories and of samples of land tenure in the area’s three different ecological zones. Also included are a discussion of history, an overview of economic changes, a description of social organization, and a lengthy presentation and analysis of politico-legal organization as embodied in *‘urf*, “customary law,” and as manifested in relations between state and tribe (Obermeyer 1968, 1973, 1977).

Abdalla S. Bujra and a team of researchers from the Social Research Center at AUC conducted a complete household census of Marsa Matruh between January and March 1966. This study provides an extraordinary snapshot of the coexistence of Bedouin residents and of Nile Valley migrant settlers in the rapidly growing town and insightfully analyzes their differential employment patterns and the main characteristics of the town’s economy (Bujra 1967). Other work by Bujra (1973) stresses the roles of local government authorities, Egypt’s general desert development organization, and local agricultural cooperative societies in introducing development into the region around 1960. Moreover, he documents the role of trade, including smuggling, in the rebuilding of the regional economy following the massive destruction it suffered during the Second World War.

A fourth study from this period is the dissertation research of Safia K. Mohsen (1971, 1975). She provides an introduction to changing relations between the northwest coast and the Nile Valley and details important information on Egyptian state legislation relevant to the area. She also describes and analyzes the *‘urf*, with special consideration of its procedures and of its applications to family conflicts and to the settlement of homicide, assault, theft, and so on. Both Obermeyer and Mohsen present rich bodies of case materials to illustrate and support their presentations of the *‘urf*, which continues to be of major importance in the region.

Abou-Zeid, Obermeyer, and Bujra all worked in communities where most of our work was done, and we are pleased to report that numerous people invariably mentioned them to us as soon as we said that we are anthropologists. We heard many stories about them, all filled with praise. We also took copies of Obermeyer’s dissertation and of Bujra’s work with us to the field and discussed their main findings with people who had known them. We found that these local people almost always agreed with what we told them the anthropologists had recorded. They lamented that these works are not available in Arabic so that they could peruse them more critically and in detail. Still, at a time when many in our own discipline of anthropology

are quick to criticize and to deconstruct the production of earlier anthropologists, we found that works of decades past still have salience—not just for us but also for some of the local people who, of course, taught the anthropologists what they recorded in the first place.

We both remember Laura Nader, our professor at Berkeley, commenting that theory in ethnographic works will probably date, as new interests and approaches replace those of the past, but the “facts” recorded from empirical fieldwork remain. Robert A. Fernea has expressed a similar view in an editorial in *Anthropology Today* (Fernea 1995). In our reading of these works, we find much of the theory rather quaint but also recognize that it reflects legitimate concerns of the anthropology of a past era during which we were also trained. The present work has benefited enormously from the “facts” recorded by these anthropologists, especially their descriptions and analyses of development in the region thirty years ago, in the 1960s, when the scope and pace of change was altered significantly.

The classic anthropological work of Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (1949) on the Sanusiya movement and the tribes of eastern Libya has also provided useful and relevant information, as have the works of anthropologist Roy H. Behnke (1980) on change among pastoralists in eastern Libya and of geographers Douglas L. Johnson (1973) and Norman N. Lewis (1987) on the history of settlement and change in eastern Libya and the steppes of greater Syria, respectively. Our reconstruction of relevant aspects of the past in Egypt’s deserts has also been informed by the writings of British colonial officials G.W. Murray (1935), C.S. Jarvis (1936), and Austin Kennett (1968 [1925]); of explorers J.C. Ewald Falls (1913) and Ahmed M. Hassanein Bey (1925); and of ethno-archaeologist Oric Bates (1970 [1914]). Many others have helped us understand the past—including Strabo, the great Roman geographer who wrote in Greek and spent several years in Egypt starting in 24 B.C.E. He described much of the northwest coast as he observed it just over two thousand years ago.

Concerning the present, we owe a debt of gratitude to botanist Mohamed A. Ayyad (1992) for his work on the environmental characteristics of the area and his evaluations of the use and misuse of its range lands. We appreciate the work of geographer Hans-Detlef Muller-Mahn (1989) for his analysis of development in an area of the northwest coast not far from where we worked. Geographer Joseph J. Hobbs’ work on the Eastern Desert (1989a) and his masterful study of Mount Sinai (1995) provide relevant comparative perspectives from within Egypt. Research in other Arab countries that has major comparative significance for this study includes the works of anthropologists John Davis on tribes and revolution in Libya (1988), Madawi Al Rasheed on economy, polity, and society in central Arabia during the nine-

teenth and early twentieth centuries (1991), Dawn Chatty on development programs and change among nomads in Oman (1996), and Andrew Shryock on oral history and texts as they relate to changing identities among tribespeople in Jordan (1997).

Meanwhile the work of anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (1986, 1993) merits special comment. Her research took place among the Awlad 'Ali, who predominate—but are not the only people—in the northwest coast. Abu-Lughod worked especially with women living in the area of Burj al-'Arab and explored their views of life as expressed in a form of poetry, or songs, known as *ghinnawa*, and in stories they told about themselves and important events in their lives. Her work has been widely acclaimed with justification and, among other things, provides a sophisticated coverage of family life, marriage, honor and shame, women's status and identity, birth and death, and changes in local religious beliefs and practices. Our study deals more with issues of development and political economy that are of importance to women and families but that in this case take place, at least in the first instance, within the domain of men. Thus the reader interested in a more comprehensive understanding of life among the Awlad 'Ali is strongly advised to read the works of Abu-Lughod. She covers a realm of relevant issues that largely falls beyond the boundaries of what we have been able to accomplish in this particular research.

In preparation for this work we compiled—with the appreciated assistance of Ms. Cynthia Wooten—a large body of documents, reports, papers, student theses and dissertations, and scholarly publications. All of this production has informed this study directly or indirectly; those works most directly relevant are appropriately cited in the text. And, as the reader will note, we draw on our own long residence and observations in Egypt for some aspects of the presentation. Moreover, the present study began in a sense in 1990, when Cole collaborated with economist Naiem A. Sherbiny and statistician Nadia Makary Girgis to investigate the roles of capital and labor in the desert development process in Egypt's Western Desert. That research consisted of a social survey of 125 investors and 182 workers in almost 200 enterprises. These private entities included large, medium, and small establishments engaged in agriculture, livestock-raising, industry, trade, other services, contracting, quarrying, and tourism and were located in Marsa Matruh, other parts of the northwest coast, Wadi an-Natrun, Sadat City, and South Tahrir (Sherbiny, Cole, and Girgis 1992). Significant results from that survey are incorporated into the present study. Also, Cole supervised the field administration of interview schedules for the survey and thus gained more than four months of firsthand experience in observing a wide range of desert development activities. About half of his time in that project

was spent in Marsa Matruh and other parts of the northwest coast, where he established contacts with officials, investors, and workers.

Our joint fieldwork for this study comprises a combined total of eight months. We began in May and June 1993, continued during five shorter stays in the course of the academic year 1993–94, and returned to the field in May and June 1994. We began our fieldwork informally as we discussed general aspects of change with a spectrum of people that gradually expanded in scope to include officials, development personnel, local businessmen, farmers, livestock-raisers, and others. With time, our work gathered momentum and became more structured as we gained knowledge about the area and its peoples and defined more clearly the issues we wished to examine in detail.

Our most intensive and systematic data gathering took place during May and June 1994. As in previous visits, we concentrated our work in an area just to the west of Marsa Matruh which includes the village of Qasr near the sea and dispersed inland homesteads or small settlements adjacent to Wadi Majid, Wadi Madwar, and Wadi Raml or elsewhere on the plateau that dominates the southern part of this area. We also conducted a few interviews at 'Umm al-Rakham, Ras Abu-Lahu, and on the plateau near an-Nijaila. Most of the people with whom we spoke in this part of the steppe are from the Ma'fas lineage of the 'Ashaibat clan of the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar tribe; but our interviews also included people from the Kamailat and Qinaishat clans of the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar, from the Siraihat clan and 'Amaira lineage affiliated to the Awlad 'Ali al-Abiad tribe, and several migrants from the Nile Valley. The latter are government employees. The others are Bedouin, most of whom engage in livestock-raising and/or agriculture. A few of these Bedouin are mainly traders and several follow urban occupations in Marsa Matruh.

We also interviewed people who live in Marsa Matruh. Most of these are migrant settlers from the Nile Valley, but a substantial portion are Bedouin who have moved to the town or whose ancestors lived there before it became an urban place. These urbanites are government employees or professionals, or they engage in trade and commerce or one aspect or another of the tourism business.

Altogether, we conducted and recorded more than one hundred interviews in May and June 1994 and about twenty during previous visits. Each interview lasted between one and a half to two hours—not including time spent drinking tea, making introductions, and exchanging pleasantries. Roughly two-thirds of the interviews were with people in the steppe and usually took place in the reception rooms of homes or occasionally in an olive grove or out on the range near a flock of sheep. The interviews in town

were conducted at people's homes and places of work or at a cafe or in the lobby of the hotel complex where we had rented apartments.

We conducted most of the interviews jointly, and, with one major exception, they were with men. Gender segregation, strongly sanctioned by society and by the Sa'udi state in Arabia, had kept Altorki mainly among the women and Cole always among the men in our previous research there. Segregation of the sexes is strong among the Bedouin in the northwest coast, but the situation is more relaxed than in Arabia. Altorki visited with the women, but she was welcomed by the men into their company for our more or less formal interviews. Cole, however, did not visit or interact with the women of Bedouin families whose men we interviewed and visited.

The interviews were open-ended exchanges in which we and they discussed a particular topic in depth until we felt that we understood what they had to say about that issue. The specific topics we explored varied but always included a concern with change and development. Thus some interviews focused mainly on herding or agriculture or tourism. Others dealt with history and colonial rule or local government and development programs. Still others revolved around identities, status differentials, '*urf*, land tenure, problems of marketing, and their evaluations of the change they have witnessed. In the steppe we made observations of the person's farm, his cisterns, and any water-harvesting constructions such as small dams or dikes he had made. If the sheep and goats were around, we looked at them, observed how much fodder they consumed, and considered the state of the natural graze and browse of the surrounding range. In the town we made observational visits to its various markets and all of its different neighborhoods. Site visits were also made to most of Marsa Matruh's touristic establishments and facilities and to a sample of tourist villages elsewhere along the coast.

We covered a great deal of complex material in concentrated periods of time. Our ability to do this was made possible by excellent guidance to the field by several local people. 'Abd ar-Rahman (Naji) 'Abd al-Latif 'Abd al-Malik 'Umar, a Bedouin lawyer about thirty years old, guided us with great skill and quiet sensitivity through the intricacies of his desert society and also introduced us to key people in Marsa Matruh. Moreover, and on his own initiative, he opened the reception room of his home in Qasr village to us on a regular basis for group discussion sessions with his paternal uncles, cousins, and others that might drop by or be called in for some particular piece of information. These sessions often extended until late in the evening, as Naji or the others explained issues that we had sometimes only partly understood. Naji's half-brother, Salim, also played an active role in our research and adeptly guided us to corners of the desert society that he especially knew. Another half-brother, Haj 'Abd al-Malik, regularly received us with

enthusiasm at his shop in Marsa Matruh, explained many things to us, and arranged several important interviews with migrants from the Nile Valley in Marsa Matruh. Indeed, we owe a special debt of gratitude to all the people of the Al 'Abd al-Malik extended family. They graciously, and usually with great eloquence, taught us much.

We are also grateful for the assistance provided by Dr. Salima 'Abd ar-Rahim from the Sharasat Bedouin affiliated to the Awlad 'Ali al-Abiad. She took us on our first visits off the main roads and into the desert. She arranged a series of important interviews with Bedouin living in Marsa Matruh, expertly guided us around the different old and new neighborhoods of the town, and recounted in detail the way of life of her own family in the desert near Sidi al-Barrani in the 1950s and her own observations of changes in Marsa Matruh since the 1960s. Many others from both the Bedouin and the Nile Valley settlers helped in numerous ways beyond the specific interviews we had with them. Also, many contributed important information and insightful observations during the course of conversations that were not part of our more formal interviewing activities. Unfortunately, we cannot mention them all by name. However, we sincerely thank them all.

At the time of our research, one United States dollar was equivalent to about 3.35 Egyptian pounds (LE). One feddan in Egypt is equivalent to 1.038 acres or 0.42 hectares. Concerning the transliteration from Arabic to English, we follow a system based on the one used by the U.S. Library of Congress. We do not distinguish long and short vowels, and no diacritical marks are used except for a straight apostrophe (') which denotes the *hamza* and a reversed apostrophe (‘) which denotes the ‘*ain*. We use the diphthong *ai* instead of *ay*. The definite article that accompanies some Arabic place names is used the first time the name occurs and deleted thereafter. Moreover, some well-known names are not transliterated but are written as they are usually spelled in English.

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We express gratitude to the governor of Matruh at the time of our fieldwork, Field Marshal Muhammad Zahir 'Abd ar-Rahman. He received us on two occasions, allowed us to pursue our research, and instructed his staff to provide us with relevant public statistics about the governorate of Matruh. We are also indebted to Engineer Muhammad 'Allam, who headed the Organization for the Development of the Northwest Coast and Siwa. He received us on several occasions and enthusiastically recounted his own observations drawn from a long and distinguished career in the region's development. He gave us useful advice and provided us with statistics compiled by his staff.

The American University in Cairo provided support for this project, including local research grants for the summer of 1993 and the academic year 1993–94. We also received sabbatical leaves and grants from the university for 1994–95. We appreciate this support and also thank Dr. Muhammad Nagi Shatla, university counselor, for providing formal letters of introduction on our behalf to the governor of Matruh and the head of the organization for development there. We appreciate anthropologist Cynthia Nelson, dean of AUC's School of Humanities and Social Sciences, for her enthusiastic encouragement of our joint work in general and this project in particular. Among many AUC colleagues who made useful contributions, we mention professor emeritus Osman L. Farrag for his hospitality and introductions in the Matruh area and for a detailed description of beachfront development there.

We gratefully express our appreciation to the Ford Foundation for an individual grant to Altorki, which covered a significant part of our expenses for fieldwork, data analysis, and writing the book. We especially thank Dr. David F. Nygaard, formerly the foundation's regional representative for the Middle East and North Africa, for his long interest in and support of our research in the Egyptian arid lands.

We spent parts of our sabbatical leaves as visiting researchers at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. We thank the center's director, Professor Barbara Stowasser, and the members of her staff for their kind hospitality and assistance. The center provided an office, a computer, and access to the library and other facilities; thus we completed the first draft of this manuscript at Georgetown during the Spring of 1995.

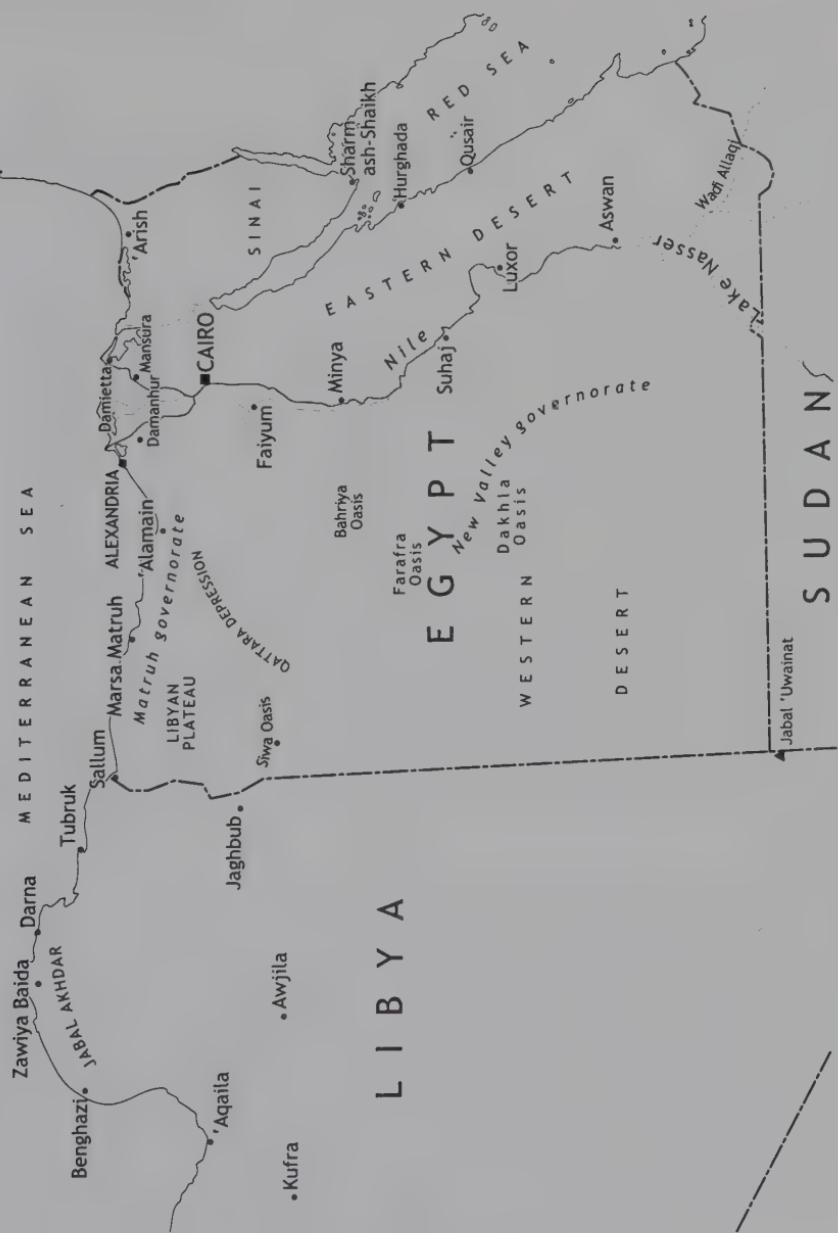
We also acknowledge with gratitude comments made on the manuscript by fellow anthropologists Lila Abu-Lughod, John Davis, Dale F. Eickelman, Nelson H. H. Graburn, and Soheir Morsy and by sociologist Donald Heisel.

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Our most profound gratitude is reserved for the people of Matruh, Bedouin and Nile Valley migrant, and young and old. Without the knowledge they shared with us, this book would not exist. We hope that what we have written faithfully reflects what they taught us about their world. We hope this work will become available to them in Arabic; and we will be pleased and honored when they rightfully challenge our “facts” and interpretations and go beyond our work to produce their own versions of their society and its transformation.

We, the authors, bear full responsibility for the presentation and interpretation of the data.

Cairo, 1998



Map of Egypt and Eastern Libya

INTRODUCTION

The Study and its Setting

Change is everywhere in the desert regions of the Arab world. Most Arabs, of course, do not live in these parts of their countries but in cities and villages in the riverain environments of the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates, and other smaller rivers or in areas where annual rainfall is moderate but sufficient to support agriculture. Examples of the latter are the western regions of greater Syria, the southwestern highlands of the Arabian Peninsula, and the coastal areas of northwest Africa. Outside these areas of ancient settlement are desert regions that comprise about 90 percent of the vast Arab territories that stretch from the Arabian Sea and the Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean. Since ancient times relatively small populations of Bedouin Arabs and other peoples have made productive and sustained use of these arid lands through livestock-raising and/or crop production. They have also long engaged in trade and transport and other economic activities such as craft production. These desert dwellers have lived as nomads and also in settlements in small and larger oases.

Newly constructed modern highways now cross the desert expanses and have replaced the narrow asphalt roads and cross-country tracks of a generation or so ago. The web of new highways increasingly extends to places that were once exceedingly remote for modern travelers. Motor vehicles have completely replaced the camel for all long-distance travel and transport. Thousands upon thousands of new wells have been sunk in the Arab deserts, and the water is raised by electrical or mechanical pumps and no longer by camel power, as was the case for several thousand years. The black tents of the Bedouin woven by women out of goat hair have become all but a relic of the past, a part of Arab cultural heritage increasingly relegated to occasional ceremonial uses and sometimes set up as part of a museum display or placed in the lobby of a five-star hotel.

The traveler in Arab desert terrains will see a few tents here and there and, in some areas, large flocks of sheep and goats and/or herds of camels. These animals, the old mainstay of nomadic household economies, are now mainly raised for the market. Except for a few holdbacks and many who have left livestock-raising altogether, the nomadic pastoralists of yesteryear

have become Bedouin ranchers today. Typically, they live in permanent housing in small towns, villages, and dispersed settlements. Many have electricity and watch television, and some have telephones. The owner of the herd or flock may have another occupation as well. Some of his sons almost certainly are engaged in other economic activities—as wage-laborers, traders, school teachers, and so on—or serve in the army as soldiers or officers. Some sons and daughters will help out with the herding and other chores related to livestock production, but quite often the herder is contracted for hire. The old pastoralists who lived in their tents as a family household, migrated with their animals from pasture to pasture, performed almost all of the work of herding as domestic labor, and derived a large proportion of their own consumption from the products of their animals are almost as rare today in the Arab world as are camels in long-distance transport.

The pace and style of change in Arab desert terrains has varied from one Arab country to another and sometimes from one desert region to another within a single country. However, commonalities stand out almost everywhere: the introduction of modern transportation and other systems of communication; major expansion of water resources; the sedentarization of all but a few of the former nomads; the creation of new settlements, large and small; the migration of some people from riverain and other old agricultural areas to new and old desert communities and a counter-movement of desert dwellers to villages and cities in the old cultivated areas, or the “sown;” state-sponsored development of new agriculture in the desert; general neglect of livestock production on arid ranges by Arab states but a rapid private commercialization of this sector; and an expansion of tourism and holiday-making activities into some, but of course not all, Arab desert regions. The roots of these changes, as we show in this case, go back to the nineteenth century and gathered momentum during the first half of the twentieth century. However, most of the changes have mushroomed since the 1950s and 1960s—decades that brought independence, state-building, and a wide spectrum of new social and economic development activities to much of the Arab world, along with large-scale oil extraction to some areas. Also, the changes mentioned above all suggest improvements—development of some sort—in the desert territories of Arab states.

Unfortunately, there is a darker side to these changes. The deserts have been opened up and are no longer the preserves of a few highly skilled and hard-working nomadic pastoralists and oasis-dwelling cultivators (along with isolated bands of marauders and bandits). Despite a lack of comprehensive statistics plus evidence of out-migration from the desert, observa-

tions clearly indicate that the original desert population is growing rapidly. Meanwhile people from outside the desert are pushing into large swaths of these terrains. The populations of desert regions seem minute in size, for example, to people from the Nile Valley, but many desert areas are already crowded. Moreover, the introduction of multiple new economic activities and the intensification and commercialization of old ones press hard on the harsh but fragile physical environment of the arid lands. Land degradation is a threat to some regions and desertification a reality for some formerly productive arid ranges in the Arab world. Darker still are the massive environmental destruction and social disruption brought to Arab deserts and their inhabitants by the First and Second World Wars, the Israeli-Arab conflict, Desert Storm, and numerous other battles around the area—not to mention the war games that modern military forces seem to enjoy in the so-called wastelands of their countries' arid lands.

A brighter side also exists to these changes, although it is tinged with ambiguities and contradictions. Desert populations, once remote and marginalized from the centers of Arab polity, are now increasingly integrated into the Arab state systems of the region on a more or less equal footing with the other traditional components of Arab societies, peasants and urbanites. For example, special status for desert populations that once exempted them from state military service or, conversely, recruited them into such service has largely ceased with the creation of more nationally integrated military and police forces. Bedouin, peasant, and urbanite now carry national identity cards, are all citizens of their states, and can vote in elections where they exist. Given the highly centralized nature of most Arab state systems, one can say that most desert Arabs have little, if any, access to the main centers of decision-making, but some from among them do have close ties to state authorities and can, and do, negotiate effectively on behalf of themselves and sometimes for the interests of their communities. In this regard, the desert people differ little from the other components of Arab societies.

The desert regions have never been delinked from the wider regional economies of the Arab world. Exchange has always existed between the desert and the sown. Moreover, the new economic activities that increasingly predominate in Arab desert regions strongly interlock them with the wider state and inter-Arab economies, which are themselves tied to the world system of contemporary capitalism. Sheep grazing on the arid ranges now depend on fodder produced outside the desert and are mainly sold for consumption in distant markets, often in other countries. Holiday-makers from Arab capitals invest in and/or make use of desert beach resorts on the basis of their own financial conditions. Expenditures in desert areas with

holiday facilities rise and fall according to national and international economic factors and, of course, are subject to the whims of political events both near and far removed from the local scenes.

Integration of the desert regions within the wider state political economies is a reality throughout the Arab world. Central state power was usually weak and sometimes existed only in theory in Arab desert regions during the long period of Ottoman rule. Egypt's desert regions were administered separately from the Nile Valley under British colonial rule, and development outside the Nile Valley was neglected. That is no longer the case for Egypt or other Arab countries. The old bogeyman of a rigid and unchanging bifurcation between the *badiya*, in the sense of desert and Bedouin, and the *hadar*, or sedentary component of Arab civilization, should be discarded as an oversimplification of the past and a nonsensical misreading or, sometimes, a deliberate and politically motivated distortion of the present. Moreover, political integration and economic interdependency do not necessarily translate into total cultural assimilation and the loss of people's old identities. Participation in a centralized state system does not automatically result in the breakdown of a local or a tribally-organized community's old ways of maintaining order and of making decisions about issues of concern to local individuals and groups. Thus the identity of Bedouin remains strong for many in the deserts of the Arab world who no longer follow the pastoralist way of life of their ancestors but work in tourism, as doctors, as farmers, and in many other occupations.

Such people know their tribes and are proud of their descent; but they also know that they are citizens of Egypt, Libya, Syria, or other Arab states. Many grumble about the actions or inactions of their governments, just as their peasant and urban compatriots do. They also see themselves as Arabs and Muslims—very old identities that transcend the borders demarcated by colonial powers in the creation of the relatively new Arab state system. Meanwhile the old desert population increasingly shares its ancestral homelands with migrant settlers from other parts of what are now their state societies—with some tension and conflict but also with the forging of new identities that express joint ties to the changing regions wherein they now coexist.

Overview of the Study

The transformation adumbrated above is explored in detail, with specific reference to Egypt's northwest coast in the governorate of Matruh, throughout the remainder of this book. A main thesis of this study is that change in the

northwest coast has strong parallels in other arid regions of the wider Arab world, and specific comparisons are made at appropriate points with change underway elsewhere—especially regarding the transformation of Arab nomadic pastoralist production to a new form of ranching and the related changes of sedentarization and the monetization of most aspects of livelihood. However, the immediate context of change in the northwest coast is that of Egypt's three deserts and the country's national process of desert development.

After describing below the specific regional setting of this study, we begin in Chapter 1 with an overview of Egypt's Western, Eastern, and Sinai deserts. We indicate their prevailing hyperaridity and sparse human populations and then examine Egypt's main desert development process. This process has especially focused on areas near *wadi an-Nil*, "the Nile Valley"—a nomenclature which denotes both the delta and the valley of the Nile in Lower and Upper Egypt, respectively—and is strongly tied to changing conditions within the Nile Valley itself. This process also has a complexity that ranges from large-scale bureaucracies and land development companies to small-scale farmers and traders and involves both public and private investment of capital and labor in new desert agriculture, as well as in industry, tourism, and other activities. This development has its specificities, but the process of change in desert areas near the Nile Valley has powerful echoes, especially since the mid-1980s, in Egypt's vast outer desert regions, including the northwest coast.

In Chapter 2, we introduce the people of Matruh, of the region we study, largely as they introduced themselves to us. They are Arabs, or Bedouin, from the Awlad 'Ali, Jumi'at, and other tribes, and also *abna' wadi an-Nil*, "Sons of the Nile Valley," who have migrated and settled there. In presenting themselves to us, people from both categories spoke of their histories; and the Bedouin explained the framework of their tribal structures and identities. We follow them in this regard and also explore an old status differential that exists but is perceived to be changing among those with tribal identities. We mention, as many migrants and some Bedouin did, the emergence of a new identity based on sharing a common region and begin a discussion of the changing meanings of old identities, which continues to unfold in later chapters.

Then, in Chapter 3, we address the relevant historical background that preceded the development that started around 1960. As is the case for Egypt generally, the beginning of the modern period for the people we study goes back to the French invasion at the end of the eighteenth century. We record the Awlad 'Ali's role in the defense of Egypt against the foreign intruders and then consider a long series of changes that affected their region enor-

mously. These changes include new relations between tribe and state introduced by Muhammad 'Ali, the Ottoman Pasha of Egypt during the first four decades of the nineteenth century; the activities of the Sanusiya religious reform movement in the last half of the nineteenth century until the end of the First World War; the early introduction of development, including a railroad, by Khedive Abbas Hilmi II at the beginning of the twentieth century; First World War battles fought in the region; British colonial rule in the desert; and devastation brought by the Second World War.

With this background in place, which shows that the region was certainly no pristine wilderness, we move on in the remaining chapters to examine the multiplicity of changes that are part of the region's contemporary development. Chapter 4 focuses on changes strongly associated with the 1960s: the introduction of the local government system; the initiation of development programs; rapid growth in Marsa Matruh and other towns; and sedentarization of the nomads. The presentation shows the region's people were not passive recipients of exogenous changes but took what was offered and used benefits to meet their own needs as they defined them and also modified new institutions to conform with their own notions of organization. This period also involved significant waged labor migration to Libya and a major expansion in legal and illegal trade.

The next three chapters focus on principal aspects of the region's economy. Chapters 5 and 6 document and analyze the transformation of pastoralism and of agriculture. The old system of mixed agro-pastoral production organized by domestic units within the context of lineages and clans is shown to have given way to commercially-oriented production influenced and subsidized by the state and development programs but also involving significant efforts and private investment by local farmers and livestock-raisers. The existence of trade as a part of the old system is substantiated, along with the recognition by producers today that the development of proper marketing of inputs and outputs has been sorely neglected in the region. Tourism and holiday-making are now of major importance in the region's economy and are dealt with in Chapters 7 and 8. Because tourism has not been the subject of extensive social science research in Egypt, we present an overview of tourism and holiday-making in the country-at-large before documenting early tourism development in Marsa Matruh. We then describe and analyze the recent rapid expansion of this activity in Marsa Matruh and the creation, since about 1980, of beachfront resorts along much of the desert coast.

Chapter 9 explores what we consider to be ambiguities and contradictions that revolve around the institutional issues of land tenure and land ownership, customary law and its adaptation to new situations, and leader-

ship and representation in local councils and boards of cooperative societies. These concerns bring into focus the changing relations between local people in the region and the domains of the state and of national and even wider economies and societies. This chapter concludes with the presentation of local perceptions of development in the northwest coast.

In the last chapter we reflect on the transformation we record in this ethnography and present our conclusions about the region's development. To anticipate, at least in part, we find what we consider to be significant improvements in many dimensions of life in the region. However, the process of change has been uneven, and new inequities abound. New ranching brings economic rewards to many small-scale and a few large-scale livestock-raisers and traders but depends heavily on a costly supply of fodder imported into the region, while a growing number of animals graze and browse an ever more crowded range. New farms in the desert produce figs, olives, and other new crops, but economic rewards are compromised by inadequate marketing and distribution systems. Meanwhile the new farms push into areas previously devoted appropriately to the cultivation of barley, as new barley fields now push into areas better suited to range. The new tourism has brought massive investment from outside the region and provides facilities for large numbers of Nile Valley Egyptians, some other Arabs, and a few foreigners to enjoy a summer holiday on the beach. However, local economic benefits are limited and unevenly distributed, while a vast stock of new beachfront housing remains empty throughout most of the year and occupies much of an ecological niche that formerly bloomed with excellent natural range or was filled with fig orchards.

Questions of equity and sustainability combine with as yet minor cultural threats and social breakdown to mar the many achievements this study documents. Yet the resilience of a proud people, often capable of eloquent discourse that resonates with conscious awareness of powerful forces that have sought to undermine their existence in the past and that threaten them at present, calls for an element of optimism that, we believe, is all too often absent in literature that evaluates "development." We have defined "development" elsewhere as a

process of change which is both incremental and purposive. . . [and which] involves an increase in the capabilities of a country to provide a sustainable improvement in the standard of living of its citizens or subjects in areas such as nutrition, health care, shelter, and education. . . [D]evelopment also has the goal of enhancing the power of [a] country vis-a-vis other countries to achieve and guarantee a significant degree of economic and political independence. . . Ideally. . . [development] efforts should also be directed toward

achieving political freedom for individuals and the guarantee of basic human rights to social and psychological well-being, however culturally defined (Altorki and Cole 1989:1).

We do not attempt to measure such changes as they relate specifically to the region of the northwest coast. However, we make qualitative judgements about them in various parts of this study. Also an issue that permeates this work is the changing relationship between the local region and its people and the state and wider society. We argue that this relationship has often been exoticized by people stressing the “otherness” of Bedouin, desert, and tribe. We find it more appropriate to have a de-essentialized view of the northwest coast as simply—but proudly—part of a provincial governorate not unlike most other small governorates in the rest of Egypt and, indeed, elsewhere in the wider Arab world.

Egypt's Northwest Coast

The northwest coast, “*sahl ash-shimal al-gharbi*,” is a narrow strip of land at the extreme north of Egypt’s Western Desert. Most of the Western Desert is hyperarid and receives no or almost no rainfall. However, its northern fringe along the Mediterranean Sea receives modest amounts of rainfall in winter, with an average annual mean of 138 mm at Marsa Matruh on the coast. Rainfall tapers off rapidly as winter “storms” move inland and becomes scarce 50 to 80 kilometers south of the coast. This modest, and also irregular, rainfall defines an ecological zone that is an arid steppe, or range. The southern border of the zone is where the rain stops or almost stops to fall.

The zone’s eastern boundary is where the range meets the border of the Nile Valley. For administrative purposes today the eastern extremity of the zone is marked by the boundary of the governorate of Alexandria, about 65 kilometers west of downtown Alexandria. In the ancient past, the Nile Valley was farther east, about 65 kilometers away from where Alexander the Great founded his greatest city in 331 B.C.E. In the very recent past, the governorate of Alexandria has expanded westward and incorporated communities such as al-‘Amriya and Burj al-‘Arab that were formerly part of the northwest coast but have now been “lost” to the Nile Valley.

Of course, the zone’s eastern boundary is not a hard one. The city of Alexandria itself plays an important role in the social and economic lives of people in the northwest coast. They often go there to shop, to study, to see the doctor, to visit relatives, and for many other reasons. Indeed, Alexandria is the main urban center for people in the northwest coast. The Nile Valley

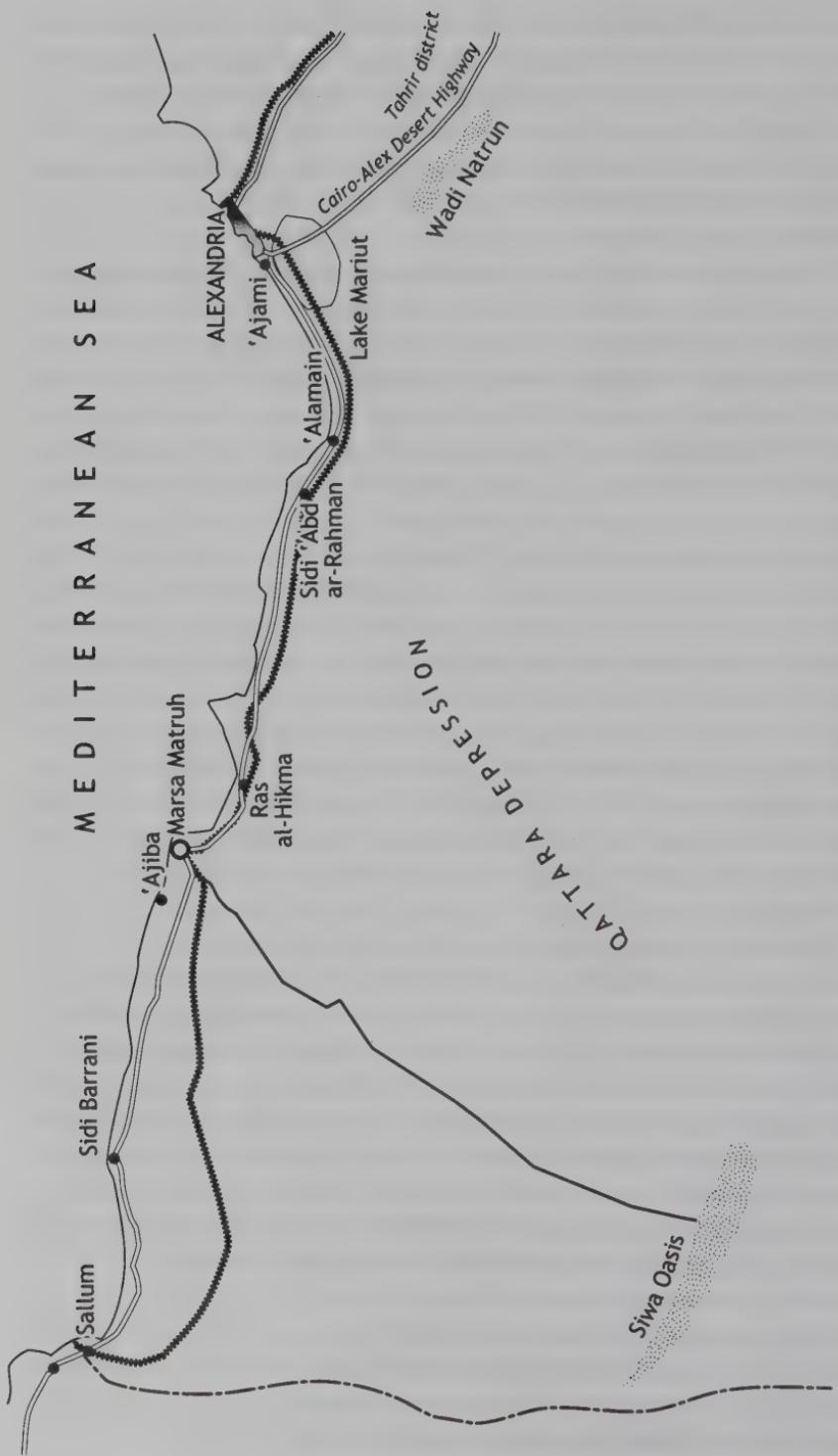
governorate of Bahaira immediately to the south of Alexandria is also linked to the northwest coast through a multiplicity of ties with a long history. And ‘Amriya has not really been lost by the northwest coast but continues to be the region’s main market center for the sale of livestock and the procurement of fodder. Also, the Bedouin in Burj al-‘Arab, like many others long settled in Alexandria and Bahaira, maintain strong social and cultural ties with their relatives in the arid steppe.

The western extent of Egypt’s northwest coast is the international border between Egypt and Libya. This border is relatively new, but it also existed long ago. According to Strabo, the Egyptian “part of the coast . . . begins at Catabathmus—for Aegypt extends as far as that place, though the country next thereafter belongs to the Cyrenaeans and to the . . . Marmaridae” (Jones 1917, 8:55). Catabathmus is today’s as-Sallum, which is the last town in Egypt before the border with Libya. However, as the Awlad ‘Ali will tell us later on, the current border was demarcated by the British and the Italians as a boundary between themselves following the Italian acquisition of Libya from Turkey not long before the outbreak of the First World War. Although recognized anciently as a boundary between different political domains, no border existed during the long period of Ottoman rule. After its demarcation by foreigners, the present border has sometimes formed a very hard boundary but not always so, and it has never been impermeable. People in the northwest coast have strong economic, social, and cultural ties that extend across the border into Libya. These ties are not unlike those that link them to parts of the Nile Valley. However, in terms of state politics and state administration, the northwest coast is unambiguously a part of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The range-dominated ecological zone of the northwest coast is the most populated part of the governorate of Matruh. This is Egypt’s second largest governorate in terms of territory. It was formerly much larger, and in the 1960s included most of the Western Desert. Today, it includes the northwest coast, the oasis of Siwa, and a large expanse of desert that is all but uninhabited—including the Qattara depression. Our research focus is on the inhabited part of Matruh, except that we do not include the important oasis of Siwa. Located in the south of the governorate, this ancient oasis is culturally and ecologically distinct from the northwest coast. However, we do indicate the existence of strong economic and social ties between Siwa and the coast in the past and at present.

The governorate of Matruh is one of five governorates that Egypt’s Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) classifies as “frontier” governorates. These governorates are also desert governorates, but since they do not include most newly-developed desert areas near the

Map of Egypt's Northwest Coast



Nile Valley, they do not coincide precisely with all of desert Egypt. In terms of population enumerated in the 1986 and 1996 censuses, Matruh is the second largest of the frontier governorates, as indicated in Figure 1. North Sinai is slightly larger. The New Valley had the third largest population in 1986, while the Red Sea governorate increased in size and became the third largest in 1996. The total population of the frontier governorates represented 1.4 percent of Egypt's total population in 1996, with Matruh accounting for 0.4 percent of the total. Compared with all of Egypt's governorates, Matruh ranked twenty-fourth out of twenty-seven (CAPMAS 1997:15).

Governorate	1986	1996
Matruh	161,173	211,866
New Valley	113,405	141,737
Red Sea	89,724	155,695
North Sinai	170,835	252,750
South Sinai	28,929	54,495
Total	564,056	816,543
Total Egypt	48,254,238	59,272,382

Source: CAPMAS 1994; 1997.

Figure 1. Population of Egypt's Frontier Governorates

How reliable the Matruh governorate population figures are is not known to us. According to a high-ranking state official in Marsa Matruh, the 1986 census enumerators arrived in the governorate by helicopter and directly enumerated people in compact settlements. They also drove along the main international highway, stopped at small shops along the way, and asked people in the shops to tell them about those living in the vicinity. If this story is true, then people living in dispersed homesteads in the steppe were probably undercounted. Our guess is that the governorate's population is larger than that enumerated in the censuses. Nonetheless, we believe that the census data reflect the population's main distributional characteristics.

Siwa accounts for about 6 percent of Matruh's population. Slightly more than half of the governorate's population is urban. The Marsa Matruh *qism*, "[police] district," which includes the city of Marsa Matruh and nearby settlements, had about seventy thousand people, or more than 40 percent of the 1986 total. Other urban areas are best described as small towns—most notably al-Hammam and ad-Dab'a in the east and Sidi Barrani in the far west. The census does not indicate people's origins or social identities, but perhaps half of the urban population is composed of settlers from the Nile Valley. What the census categorizes as rural would be more correctly designated as either *badiya* or steppe. Except for some land reclamation areas in

the east, Bedouin strongly predominate in the steppe, but the reader should note that Bedouin also make up about half of the governorate's urban population. Altogether, Bedouin probably comprise two-thirds or more of the governorate's population; people from Siwa and the Nile Valley make up the rest, along with a few foreigners and other Arabs.

According to census data, the governorate's population increased at rates of about 4 percent a year between 1976 and 1986. Average household size was the second largest for any Egyptian governorate in 1986, with 5.9 persons per household; in 1996, Matruh's average was 5.0 persons per household—compared to an all-Egypt average of 4.6. About 58 percent of the population over ten years old was illiterate in 1986 and about 22 percent could read and write only. However, the 1986 census enumerated 1,411 people with university degrees and six with postgraduate degrees. More than three quarters of those in the active labor force described themselves as engaged in the private sector. About 17 percent worked in government service and 6 percent said they worked for the public sector. Meanwhile, most of the population is Muslim; but the census reports 1,976 Christians in the area in 1986 (CAPMAS 1986; 1994; 1997).

A traveler speeding along in comfort on the new "desert" highway from Cairo to Alexandria comes to an overpass within an hour and a half or so of having left the pyramids area in Giza. Underneath the overpass run the modern tracks of the old khedival railroad. Soon after the overpass, the traveler can turn off the Cairo-Alexandria highway and cross the salt flats of an arm of what remains of ancient Lake Mariut. Within a couple of kilometers, the traveler will reach another highway. Turning to the left, he/she enters the northwest coast. The main ecological and geographic characteristics of this zone are well described by Ayyad (1992:2-36), Hobbs (1989b:39-40), and Millington (1993:3-4, 11); and we draw heavily on their accounts in addition to our own observations for the following description of this study's wider regional setting.

An excellent four-lane divided highway now crosses the area and is said to have been built by Mu'ammar Qadhafi—or, more correctly, was financed by the government of Libya. For roughly the first half of a trip from the outskirts of Alexandria to the Libyan border at Sallum, the traveler crosses a wide coastal plain with sandy soils that is dissected by several parallel limestone ridges with depressions in between. In the east, the traveler will see the scant remains of a major limestone ridge recently quarried almost to depletion. Verdant groves of fig trees also exist, along with stone houses scattered across the landscape. The fig trees and the houses belong to Bedouin. The traveler will notice high brick, stone, or concrete walls that stretch for kilometers along the north side of the highway almost to al-'Alamain and then

at some sites farther west. Behind these walls are tourist villages built for summer holiday-makers. Thousands of multistoried apartment buildings, chalets, villas, and a few hotels have recently been constructed or continue to be built in these new resorts. Beyond dazzles an azure sea with patches of brilliant turquoise. Yet a pall of haze often hangs over this part of the northwest coast, as strong north winds pick up the fine sand and topsoil—no longer held in place by desert grasses and bushes. This natural flora has been uprooted as part of the process of beachfront development.

Passing the Second World War killing-field of 'Alamain, with its cemeteries and war memorials, the traveler continues on across the sandy plain and can see a row of high metal towers being set up as part of an international electrical grid we were told will stretch from Morocco to the Arab East. When completed, it will pass over or near hundreds of dispersed settlements and homesteads which have no connection to any electrical grid. Near Dab'a, the traveler passes close to a site chosen for the location of a nuclear power station. Eventually, the traveler crosses the railroad and immediately begins an ascent onto the ad-Dif'a, or Libyan, Plateau, a tableland which reaches some 215 meters above sea level and dominates the western half of the northwest coast. The tableland has what is described as a gently sloping surface that ends in an escarpment near the coast. Numerous wadis with steep slopes in their upper reaches cut through the plateau and run into the sea or onto the coastal plain, which is narrow where it exists in the western part of the region. The plateau area has land that is rocky and has a hard crust, while the upper and middle portions of wadis have patches of shallow topsoil with either fine sediment or with rocks and gravel. Some lower parts of wadis near the sea have deep soils that are the result of accumulation from runoff.

Marsa Matruh is not far from where the tableland meets the wide coastal plain which dominates in the east. West of Marsa Matruh, the highway continues across the tableland. The traveler will see large patches of barley growing, being harvested, or turned over to grazing—depending on the season and the rain. She/he will pass through several settlements strung out along the highway and go through Sidi Barrani, a small town. As in the east, the traveler will see numerous stone houses scattered about according to the dispersed settlement pattern which predominates outside the region's towns and city. Of course, some of the main aspects of the northwest coast remain hidden for the traveler on the highway. The principal towns in the east are located more inland on the railroad and are not visible from the highway. A wealth of relatively recent development in and around the wadi systems of the west is also not seen from the highway. Later on, we will take the reader into some of the wadis in the west and also describe its ranges and the gov-

ernorate's capital city of Marsa Matruh. We will also provide a more detailed view of some of the region's beachfront development.

As part of an introduction to the region, the reader should know that the northwest coast has a complex natural flora of bushes, shrubs, and grasses that provide it with Egypt's most productive range lands. Livestock-raising has always been the region's main economic activity. However, crop production—especially barley but also other crops—has always formed an integral part of the region's economy. Trade has a long history of importance in the region. Contracting and construction are very important at present, along with tourism. Aside from its environmental influence and its beaches, the sea plays almost no role in the region's economy. Maritime shipping and fishing are all but nonexistent. However, the harvesting of sponges from the sea was important in the past, and transport by sea was common before the building of the railroad and an old highway that predated the newly constructed one mentioned above. Some oil and gas fields exist in the area, and several oil companies have modest operations there. Some quarrying takes place, especially of gravel. The region has no industry, except for minor processing of olive oil and small-scale workshops for furniture-making, carpentry, repairs, and the like. The hunting of migratory birds, especially quail, provides some income for Bedouin who mainly trap them in nets and sell what they themselves do not eat. The harvesting of desert truffles has recently provided a windfall for a few who export them to Kuwait, which lost a main source of this delicacy in the range lands of northeastern Arabia as a result of Desert Storm's land mines and other devastation of the environment.

The reader should also know the results of Strabo's survey of the region twenty centuries ago. He describes it from west to east and, as noted, indicates its western boundary to have been more or less where it is today. He mentions coming to "the village of the Aegyptians," probably near today's village of 'Umm al-Rakham where Ramesses II built a temple and where ancient Egyptians maintained a garrison (O'Connor 1983:274–275). Next was Paraetonium, "a city and large harbour," which corresponds to the site of today's Marsa Matruh. East of Paraetonium, he notes several settlements and harbors and characterizes the western and middle parts of the coastal region as "without good wine . . . [which] they call 'Libyan' wine, which . . . is used by most of the tribe of Alexandrians."

Farther east and closer to Alexandria were a larger number of settlements and harbors, and Strabo mentions that near one of them "there is a rocky place on the sea where . . . crowds of people in the prime of life assemble during every season of the year." These are presumed to have been "revelers" out for recreation on the beach. He also indicates significant recreation-

al activity in the area of what was then a much larger Lake Mariut. The shores of the lake were well inhabited, “and the vintages in this region are so good that the Mareotic wine is racked off with a view to ageing it” (Jones 1917, 8:55–59). Strabo further informs us that the ancient Egyptians set up a guard in a village called Rhacotis near the site where Alexandria itself was later located. This guard was ordered “to keep away any who should approach” the region, especially the land-hungry Greeks. Moreover, “they gave over the parts round about the village to herdsmen, who likewise were able to prevent the approach of outsiders” (*ibid*:29).

Much changed after Strabo’s time. However, the history of the northwest coast remains practically unknown. The ruins of ancient settlements and indications of ancient productive use of the steppe lie scattered about the region largely untouched by modern archaeology. In the absence of data, controversial speculation has dominated what little discourse has existed about the northwest coast in the past. We address these speculations later on. Here, we mention only that elements that Strabo identified also characterize the area today. Lake Mariut has all but dried up and the fine Mareotic wine disappeared long ago. However, agriculture was present then as now—but generally not of very high quality. Recreational uses were present during Roman times as they are now. Shepherds long predated the arrival of the Greeks and were not a menacing threat to ancient Egypt but formed a patriotic guard for the Nile Valley and also sustained productive use of the range. Shepherds remain in the area today and, like their ancient forbearers, are also a part of Egypt.

CHAPTER 1

DESERTS AND DESERT DEVELOPMENT IN EGYPT

The northwest coast and the other parts of desert Egypt share their country with the Nile Valley. The ancient floodplain of the Nile between Aswan and the Mediterranean Sea comprises some thirty-five thousand square kilometers, or about three and a half percent of Egypt's sovereign territory of just over a million square kilometers. Nile water, a rich alluvium, and a warm climate combine to make the Nile Valley one of the world's best regions for agriculture. Indeed, both ancient and modern Egyptian farmers have sustained agricultural production in the Nile Valley since long before the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt about five thousand years ago. Today, however, much of the Nile Valley's agricultural land is rapidly being lost to other uses.

Political scientist John Waterbury (1978:106) quotes a statement to Egypt's People's Assembly in 1973 by the then-minister of agriculture, Mustafa Jabali. The minister's statement indicates that between 1963 and 1973 Egypt had reclaimed from the desert outside of the Nile Valley almost a million feddans of "new" land for agriculture. Nonetheless, the country had suffered a net loss of two hundred thousand feddans of cultivated land during that ten-year period. To explain this phenomenon, Waterbury mentions "the constant nibbling away of existing cultivated acreage" for nonagricultural land uses and calculates that about 10 percent of the Nile Valley's six million feddans had been lost to nonagricultural uses by the mid-1970s. Since that time the "nibbling away" has continued and probably accelerated. To our knowledge, no official statistics exist on this phenomenon. However, one scholar presents an "educated guess" that the current "encroachment rate" on agricultural land in the Nile Valley is about thirty thousand feddans a year. He also reports that between 1984 and 1993 the state brought to the courts more than half a million cases of alleged violations of its agricultural zoning regulations (Khouzam 1994:5–6).

Ironically, the only part of Egypt that was not desert is now suffering a form of "desertification," by which we mean the destruction and consequent loss to society of productive land. Arable land in the Nile Valley is some-

times legally, but often illegally, converted to use for housing, factories, workshops, warehouses, banks, retail stores, business and professional offices, markets, schools, universities, hospitals, hotels, social clubs, sports clubs, government offices, and so on. One factor that partly explains this "nibbling away" is Egypt's population growth. The country's inhabitants, who have always mainly lived in the Nile Valley, have increased from just under 10 million in 1897 to just over 30 million in 1966 and to almost 60 million in 1996. Future projections indicate perhaps 100 million in about 2025 (Bishay 1992).

Other factors also influence the conversion of Egypt's best agricultural land to other uses. The cessation of the Nile's annual flood—finally achieved for all of Egypt north of Aswan by the construction of the High Dam in the 1960s—removed physical limits that formerly restricted building in the Nile Valley to high areas not subject to flooding. Market forces are also at work, as the cash value of land for nonagricultural uses in the Nile Valley is higher than that for cultivated land. A person who constructs an apartment building or a warehouse on a plot of land reasonably expects a higher return from that investment than would be the case for producing crops on the same plot. The state also plays a role, as it fails to enforce its own zoning codes or levies paltry fines for their violation. Moreover, the state itself is a builder on Nile Valley land.

Paradoxically, the loss of Egypt's best agricultural land to other uses is the cumulative result of almost two hundred years of change initiated, first, in the name of progress and, more recently, under that of development. However, a growing population no longer all required to work in agriculture could have been channeled around the turn of the twentieth century into new communities located outside the floodplain of the Nile. New social institutions and new commercial and industrial enterprises could have been sited in such communities so as not to take up finite agricultural space. What could have been did not happen, except to a small degree in a few instances, such as the creation of *Misr al-Jadida*, "New Egypt," or Heliopolis, in the desert northeast of Cairo during the first decade of the twentieth century (see J. Abu-Lughod 1971:138–140).

Today, Nile Valley Egyptians look to the deserts of Egypt for a solution to at least some of the many problems they increasingly perceive and worry about. These problems include crowding, noise, and pollution, along with unemployment and the loss of food security. Can the deserts help? Yes; parts of the deserts have already absorbed some of the Nile Valley's dynamic energy. They bloom with new agriculture. Factories, tourist resorts, and new housing are increasingly located at sites in the deserts. However, physical limitations exist to how much Egypt's deserts can absorb from the Nile

Valley. Moreover, the deserts already have populations with their own needs and aspirations for economic and social well-being.

The Deserts of Egypt

Desert Egypt consists of three deserts—the Sinai Peninsula (61,000 square kilometers), the Eastern, or “Arabian,” Desert (223,000 square kilometers), and the Western, or “Libyan,” Desert (681,000 square kilometers). Together, these deserts occupy most of Egypt’s sovereign territory but have a small fraction of the country’s population. Each desert has its own specificities and its own internal differences; however, all three are deserts because of climate and not because of significant desertification brought about by human beings.

According to geographer Karl W. Butzer (1976:13–14, 26–27), the area of today’s Egypt suffered some eight thousand years of hyperaridity between about 25,000 and 17,000 B.P. This very dry period was followed by about twelve thousand years of more frequent rainfall, especially in the Red Sea Hills of the Eastern Desert. During this moister period, the deserts provided enough game for seasonal hunting and sufficient vegetation for modest pastoral production by herders based in the Nile Valley and by desert-based nomads. However, a second period of aridity started just over five thousand years ago; and hyperaridity has prevailed for the past four thousand years. Many species disappeared from Egypt’s deserts or became rare long ago; even the camel became extinct in North Africa until reintroduced as a beast of burden in Ptolemaic times. Human actions played some role in these disappearances, but climatic change was the main factor.

Rainfall is exceedingly scarce throughout Egypt. The Mediterranean coast has the highest annual averages, with 138 mm at Marsa Matruh and 97 mm at ‘Arish in north Sinai. The yearly average at Cairo is 35 mm, while Aswan and Hurghada have annual averages of 3 mm and Siwa has 1 mm (Hobbs 1989b:22, 52). Large parts of Egypt receive only a brief shower once every ten years or so. By contrast, the driest parts of the Arabian Peninsula, such as the Empty Quarter, receive more rainfall than most of Egypt; and the vast steppes of northern Arabia, western Iraq, and eastern Syria and Jordan have a mean annual rainfall of between 100 and 200 mm. Northeastern Libya also receives more rain than Egypt. Although arid, these steppic areas to the east and west of Egypt blossom with a relative abundance of annual and perennial shrubs and grasses and are associated with the development of highly productive nomadic pastoralist systems. Because of Egypt’s hyperaridity, desert-based pastoralism has been limited for the last four thousand

years or so to small zones along the country's northwest coast, in parts of Sinai, and in the Red Sea Hills.

The lack of rainfall, of course, does not necessarily mean the absence of water. In Egypt's case, an important underground source of water exists in the form of the Nubian sandstone aquifer which begins in Chad and flows generally to the north and northeast. This aquifer underlies part of the Eastern Desert and most of the Western Desert, in addition to large parts of Libya. Most of this significantly large reserve of water is of ancient origin, although minor recharge is said to occur from humid mountain areas in Chad. Salinity increases toward the north of the aquifer, but most of the water is considered suitable for drinking and for agricultural purposes (Hefny 1994:196–199).

The Nubian sandstone aquifer is the source of water that sustains the main settled communities in the oases of the Western Desert. In addition to Siwa in the Matruh governorate, the most notable of these oases are Wadi Natrun in the Bahaira governorate, Bahriya in the Giza governorate, and Farafra, Dakhla, and Kharja in the *Wadi al-Jadid*, "New Valley," governorate. These oases are located in depressions and are mostly surrounded by steep escarpments. Siwa and Kharja, along with the uninhabited Qattara depression, are below sea level. The depressions typically have deep deposits of alluvium, and water from the Nubian sandstone aquifer sometimes flows to the surface as artesian springs and wells. A rich agriculture has long characterized most of the oases; but they are also plagued by poor drainage, which leads to saline lakes surrounded by salt marshes. Moreover, shifting sand dunes have destroyed some cultivated areas in the oases and threaten others. The Western Desert has a few other oases that are very small. Al-Qara is at the extreme west of the Qattara depression, not far from Siwa. Near the southern border with Sudan are Kurkur, Dunqul, and Dinaiqil oases, while the Jabal 'Uwainat exists in the extreme southwest and has springs and a few small settlements. The rest of the Western Desert is largely barren. Sandstone and limestone plateaus dominate most of the vast terrain, along with the Great Sand Sea and other smaller bodies of sand (Hobbs 1989b:40–45).

Paradoxically, the development of modern transportation closed much of the Western Desert to the outside world and increased the isolation of the oases. Archaeologist Ahmed Fakhry records how this happened in the case of Bahriya:

[C]amels . . . carried the mail to Bahriyah until 1937. In January 1938 there was a change; a transportation contractor began to carry the mail by car from Cairo. Although theoretically the car was supposed to leave for Bahriyah

every ten days, there was usually a delay of at least one or two days from Cairo. Then, too, the car was liable to break down with a further delay for repairs or rescue by another car, with the result that it was never known when the mail would arrive. The postmaster and government officials would talk highly of the "good old days" when the mail was brought by camel. It left Samalut at dawn on a fixed day and took four days to reach Bahriyah . . . The camel was always on time, never more than one hour late on very rare occasions. In 1968, I was told that the problem of the mail deliveries to Bahriyah is still the same, but that to Farafra has become worse (Fakhry 1974:24–25).

Since the days of ancient Egypt, the oases were not just the scenes of agricultural production. They were also centers on well-established routes that crossed the Western Desert and linked the Nile Valley with Libya and other parts of Africa. With the spread of Islam, they became important links in a far-flung and highly developed network of trans-Saharan trade and travel, including pilgrimage. With the emergence of modern sea, air, and land transportation, the old desert routes declined, along with the centers which had serviced them. Recently, however, new highways have been constructed or have been planned for the near future. Communications with the Nile Valley have also been enhanced by a regular air service to the New Valley.

As the name of the New Valley governorate suggests, the areas of the oases and the surrounding desert have been viewed as potentially comparable to the old valley of the Nile. President Gamal Abdel-Nasser and other leaders have heralded the future development of this part of the Western Desert. Modern wells have been sunk to tap the ancient underground water, and land reclamation efforts have been initiated. Significant mining of iron ore has been developed near Bahriya, and a small oasis filled with trees and greenery has been created for company workers and employees on the bleak plateau above the ancient oasis. A small tourist industry is also growing in most of the oases. Meanwhile, a decision to convert southern parts of the Western Desert into a "new delta" was proclaimed in 1996 as part of an endeavor known as the Tushka project.

Despite some achievements, large-scale agricultural development in the oases has been plagued by technical, financial, and administrative problems since the 1950s (see Gritzinger 1990; Muller-Mahn 1994). Such problems are not insurmountable, and improved productivity and greater settlement in the oases is likely to take place. However, significant development on the vast plateaus would require the drilling of deep wells at considerable expense. The quality of soils on the plateaus is not well known, but they are probably not very good for agriculture. Nonagricultural communities could

be built on the plateaus, but development of any sort in the Great Sand Sea is all but impossible.

The Eastern Desert is strikingly different from the Western Desert. The Red Sea Hills, or Mountains, run as a north-south chain through most of this desert and reach a maximum height of 2,187 meters. A narrow coastal plain lies east of the hills, and numerous short wadis run down from them and across the plain to the Red Sea coast. On the western slope of the hills, larger wadi systems with numerous tributaries run down to the Nile Valley. Annual rainfall is rare, but the eastern slope catches considerable moisture from clouds. On occasion, heavy downpours occur and the wadis flow with water—sometimes with devastating effect. Usually, however, water seeps underground through the wadi system and provides enough moisture to sustain desert grasses and other plants. The hills also have some dripping springs, and wells have been sunk in different parts of the Eastern Desert (Hobbs 1989b:45–51).

With its very modest amounts of moisture, the Eastern Desert has long supported minor pastoralist activity. Small groups of nomads, including the Ma'aza, 'Ababda, and Bisharin among others, have ancestral territories in the region and raise sheep, goats, and camels. Several small towns exist on the desert Red Sea coast and include Marsa 'Alam, Qusair, Safaga, Hurghada, and Ras Gharib (*ibid*). Suez, at the southern entrance to the Suez Canal, is located on desert land and could be considered an important city of the Eastern Desert, although it is usually identified with the canal and its region and not with the desert. Except for the nomads, communities in the Eastern Desert primarily depend on Nile water piped into the area. Agriculture hardly exists in the Eastern Desert, although some agricultural development has taken place in Wadi al-Allaqi in the southern part of the area. Historically, mining has been of major importance in the Red Sea Hills. Tourism has now become the main industry in the Eastern Desert, as beach-front development along the coast has mushroomed since the early 1980s.

Sinai is Egypt's smallest but most famous desert. Mentioned in the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur'an, parts of the peninsula—especially Mount Sinai, or Jabal Musa—have a sacred dimension for many (Hobbs 1995). Nonetheless, Sinai and its peoples have suffered abuse during the twentieth century. The First World War introduced modern warfare to Sinai, as the British army moved men and matériel across the north and engaged in skirmishes with the Turkish army before moving on to occupy Palestine. When the British, French, and Israelis combined forces to attack Egypt in 1956, the Israelis invaded the peninsula and briefly occupied it. In 1967, the Israeli army once again invaded and occupied Sinai, until a phased withdrawal began in 1979 and was completed on April 25, 1982.

A large minority of Sinai's population was forced to flee from this part of Egypt and to resettle elsewhere in the country, including at Marsa Matruh and in a large desert land reclamation area in Tahrir district west of the Nile delta. Data collected by Cole in north and south Sinai during the summer of 1983 indicate a severe setback to the region's development caused by the Israeli occupation. Bedouin and townspeople complained of severe restrictions placed on their activities by the occupiers and mentioned numerous instances of their forced removal from lands they had long exploited for pasture and crop production. People in Sinai especially complained of the failure of the Israelis to invest in any kind of local community development, such as schools or health care. The occupiers did set up some health clinics, but serious illness or injury required air evacuation out of Sinai—a terrifying event for patients and their families. More seriously, the Israeli occupation isolated Sinai and its people from the rest of Egypt and the wider Arab world at a time when many Arab economies were experiencing a boom thanks to high oil prices. The Israeli labor market was opened to men from Sinai; but the Israelis denied them access to Arabian labor markets where wages were much higher than those paid to Arabs in territories controlled by the Israeli state. Moreover, Egyptian development programs were curtailed in Sinai due to the Israeli presence and at a time when Egypt invested considerable effort in developing other desert regions in the country.

Due to the Israeli invasions and occupation, development activities in Sinai are more highly charged emotionally than is the case for development in the Eastern and Western Deserts. The reunion of Sinai with the rest of Egypt was greeted with exhilaration throughout the country, from Aswan to Alexandria and from Marsa Matruh to 'Arish. The blood of thousands of Egyptian soldiers had been spilled in the desert terrain of Sinai in defense of Egypt and also in defense of the rights of another Arab people, the Palestinians. At the very least, the Egyptian state authorities and the people of the Nile Valley and of the deserts did not want Sinai to suffer foreign occupation ever again. For strategic purposes, the Egyptian state formulated plans for major land reclamation and the settlement of hundreds of thousands of people from other parts of Egypt in Sinai. American consultants argued that the water and soil resources of Sinai were limited and that the development of large-scale agricultural settlements was economically not feasible (Dames and Moore 1985). The Egyptian state countered that, no matter what the financial costs might be, development of new settlements in Sinai is the best guarantee against future Israeli aggression. Nonetheless, no large-scale migration into Sinai has taken place since the final Israeli withdrawal almost fifteen years ago. Still, the presence of Nile Valley Egyptians in Sinai in the 1990s is much stronger than was the case previously; indeed,

in 1997 the first Nile water flowed into the peninsula through pipes under the Suez Canal and into the north Sinai section of the as-Salam (Peace) Canal, which is intended to reach Wadi al-'Arish and to provide water for significant new agriculture and new population settlement in this arid zone.

Space does not permit a full discussion of Sinai, which has at least as much complexity as does the northwest coast. We note, however, that most of Sinai's population lives along the Mediterranean coast in the north of the peninsula, where agriculture is practiced along a part of the coastal strip and along wadis that flow into the sea. Sedentary Bedouin farm and raise sheep and goats in this part of Sinai; and some fishing, especially in Lake Bardawil, takes place. Several small towns are located on the north coast; but 'Arish is Sinai's main city and is composed of a mixture of people from Bedouin backgrounds, other ethnic origins, and Nile Valley migrants. Central and south Sinai have small populations of people from numerous Bedouin tribes or fragments of tribes. Small-scale herding, farming in wadis or in high mountain gardens and orchards, and some fishing are the main old occupations of these people. Moreover, a series of small towns dot the western edge of Sinai, with residents composed of Bedouin settlers and Nile Valley migrants and, in some cases, a few Greeks. Mining, including the extraction of petroleum, has been important in Sinai. Tourism, as along the Red Sea coast of the Eastern Desert, is now a major economic activity along Sinai's coasts and in the interior at Mount Sinai and the Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Katherine. This new tourism attracts workers and investors from both Sinai and the Nile Valley, along with Egyptian holiday-makers and Israeli, European, and other tourists.

This brief description of Egypt's three deserts does not do justice to their complexities and local variations. We could mention that all three have long provided sites for Christian monasteries and could also stress the importance of trade and Muslim pilgrimage routes across the Eastern Desert and Sinai, as is the case for the Western Desert. The geological features of the deserts and their distributions of minerals, flora, fauna, and soil types deserve much more consideration than we are able to provide. Nonetheless, our presentation suggests that Egypt's deserts are especially harsh environments that do not offer significant space for large-scale horizontal expansion of agriculture. This conclusion, however, is contradicted by the erroneous belief that Egypt's deserts, or large parts of them, bloomed with agriculture until Arab Bedouin converted them to desert at the time of the Muslim conquest or soon thereafter.

A Perspective from the Ancient Past

Although the archaeology and history of desert Egypt has yet to be investigated and written in any significant detail, strong evidence does confirm the existence of large-scale mining and quarrying activities at numerous desert sites in ancient times, especially in the Red Sea Hills but also elsewhere. Evidence further confirms major agricultural expansion in the Western Desert oases, the Faiyum, and some areas of the desert coasts during the millennium of Greek (Ptolemaic), Roman, and Byzantine rule (332 B.C.E.–642 C.E.). This millennium also witnessed large-scale land reclamation and agricultural development in the Nile delta; and ancient Egypt's population grew to about five million—its maximum size ever, according to Butzer (1976:91–92).

Agricultural expansion reached its zenith during the first century or so C.E. under the Romans, when Egypt supplied Rome with much of the wheat consumed in the imperial capital and other Italian cities. According to historian Alan Bowman (1986:101–102), agriculture especially boomed at this time in the Faiyum, where new crops were introduced and the amount of cultivated land was tripled by expanding irrigation into the surrounding desert. The flourishing of agriculture and the existence of numerous settlements in the ancient district of Mareotis around Lake Mariut west of Alexandria are not doubted for at least part of this millennium (see DeCosson 1935; Kassas 1972). The existence of cisterns, underground granaries, and the remains of small dams and dikes in the wadi systems of the western part of the northwest coast, known as Marmarica in ancient times, are not precisely dated but clearly attest to ancient agriculture in this region. Moreover, no less a personage than Lawrence of Arabia investigated a similar and ancient water harvesting and storage system in Sinai (Jarvis 1936:128–129).

What happened to this ancient “desert development?” One point of view is well expressed by DeCosson with specific reference to the Mareotis district and more generally for Marmarica, as follows:

[Following the Muslim conquest,] the decline *must* have set in, for with the Arabs came the wild Beduin and the disappearance of the Roman master farmers. The land *must* have suffered progressively with increase of the lawlessness of the Beduin, farms and villages *would* have become deserted, and wells and cisterns neglected, as security was less and less guaranteed (DeCosson 1935:59–60; emphasis added).

Negative stereotyping of the Bedouin and positive stereotyping of the Romans aside, the reader will note that this statement is conjecture. Nonetheless, some read this and many similar statements by others as fact, although no data are presented to support the speculation of what *must* have been.

Whatever may have been the role of Arab Bedouin, evidence exists that other factors clearly triggered agricultural and population decline in Egypt before the arrival of Islam and the Arabs. First, one should note that the agricultural expansion itself was, according to Butzer (1976:92), an exploitative system “designed to supply Rome with food.” He further argues that, “It is worth emphasizing that peak population coincided not with maximum prosperity but with the period of optimal colonial development and exploitation.” Change in the metropole affected production in colonized ancient Egypt. As power shifted from Rome to Byzantium, the center downgraded Egypt’s role in the supply of food and largely replaced it by new production in Asia Minor. The general weakening of central Roman power was accompanied by a decline in the effectiveness of administrative rule in Egypt. Religious strife and civil war broke out in Egypt. Plague, a major earthquake, a general rise in the level of the Mediterranean Sea, and subsidence of the deltaic coast were events and processes that had serious impacts on Egypt prior to the advent of Islam and continued to affect the country for centuries after the arrival of the Arabs.

That the Muslim conquest occurred swiftly and encountered relatively little resistance strongly suggests that Greco-Roman-Byzantine Egypt had already suffered a major decline long before the Arabs arrived in 639. The desert defenses of the country had been largely abandoned. The agricultural expansion into parts of the desert had already collapsed. For the Faiyum, Bowman (1986:19) shows that the depopulation of villages was already apparent by the fourth century C.E., “as the desert reclaimed once-fertile areas of land.” Moreover, care must be taken to not exaggerate the ancient “desert development.” According to Butzer (1976:97),

It is . . . doubtful whether there were more than thirty-five thousand inhabitants in the oases during the most intensive phase of Greco-Roman development. Furthermore, it is probable that the Libyco-Berber population of the desert oases in earlier times never exceeded fifteen or twenty thousand.

No evidence so far exists of major habitation of Egypt’s deserts in the past. Guard posts existed in many places, as can easily be seen today by a drive through the Wadi Hammamat in the Eastern Desert. Mining and quarrying camps were established in desert locations, but like today’s oilfield sites, they

did not result in large-scale settlements that naturally reproduced themselves. Some small and a few moderate-sized ports dotted the desert coasts; but no claim can be made that any of these were major cities. Yet a major transformation has been underway during the past half century or so on desert land adjacent to or near the old floodplain of the Nile and, also, at more distant desert locations.

Desert Development in Egypt

“Desert development” in Egypt refers to a process of change largely synonymous with land reclamation for the horizontal expansion of agriculture into the desert. This modern process has ancient roots in the Nile Valley, where agricultural land reclamation started more than seven thousand years ago. Egypt is not just the “gift of the Nile” as Herodotus proclaimed; Egypt is also the gift of the ancient Egyptians and of the many peoples—Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and others—who joined them in later periods. In predynastic times, the Nile’s valley and delta formed a wilderness where people fished, hunted, and gathered for their subsistence. However, ancient peoples began to domesticate this natural environment and increasingly brought Nile water under human management and control and converted much of the river’s floodplain into fields for agricultural production.

Modern Nile Valley Land Reclamation

Modern agricultural land reclamation in Egypt began in the early nineteenth century under the auspices of Muhammad ‘Ali, continued under his khedival and royal successors, and has expanded significantly into the desert under the republican regimes since the July Revolution of 1952. Foreign capital and expertise have been of major importance in this transformation; but enormous amounts of Egyptian labor, along with Egyptian capital and expertise, were of crucial importance in completing the process, begun by the ancient Egyptians, of totally harnessing the River Nile and bringing as much land as possible under cultivation.

Starting in the 1810s, about thirty thousand kilometers of new canals were dug and older ones deepened in the Nile Valley. In 1833, barrages began to be constructed on the Nile and on many of the canals. This activity was followed by the construction of a series of increasingly large dams on the Nile at Aswan in 1902, 1912, and 1933. Finally, in 1960, work began on the High Dam, which was inaugurated in 1964 and came into full operation in 1970. Horizontal and vertical expansion of agriculture were both achieved

during this modern period of land reclamation. With the exception of parts of Lakes Manzala, Burullus, Idku, and Mariut along the Mediterranean coast in the northern delta, all of the land within the floodplain of the Nile was reclaimed. Almost two million feddans were reclaimed during the nineteenth century and another million during the first half of the twentieth century, giving Egypt a total of almost six million feddans of agricultural land in the Nile Valley by 1947. Also, with the construction of the High Dam, perennial irrigation—first developed in ancient Egypt—finally replaced basin irrigation dependent on the flood throughout Upper and Lower Egypt and in the Faiyum; thus, two or more crops per year can be grown on the same plot of land throughout Nile Valley Egypt (Waterbury 1978; Hobbs 1989b:24–37).

Land reclamation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries especially involved drainage and land preparation for agriculture in the delta. Most of this work was carried out by corvée labor provided by Egyptian fellahin and *tarahil*, “migrant [rural workers].” Private land development companies also flourished during this period. The sociopolitical goal of increasing the national wealth through greater agricultural production was an important factor in this land reclamation. However, private speculation and profit motives also existed—as described, for example, by a German explorer who observed the process in the western delta province of Bahaira at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Where twenty years ago [the land was desert], white snowfields of cotton-trees and palm-shaded villages are now to be seen. A perfectly organized land speculation has set in. One day the Hukuma [government] appears on unenclosed ground, hattje or desert; the authorities intervene and make the owner's title safe. Such and such a Beduin tribe can perhaps prove certain ancient rights, and is then compensated with money. Until then the land had no value. For a feddan, or Egyptian acre, £3, £4, or £5 is paid, an enormous sum for worthless land. A year later the drainage of the ground is begun by making little trenches, the network of which is drawn closer and closer. The Bey or the company that bought the land has only to wait for the connection with the neighboring canal to be made for the gold to flow in streams. The company itself cultivates half of it; cotton, rice, durrha [corn] are planted and attended to by fellahs, who obtain cattle and implements and a fifth of the harvest by way of wages. The rest [of the land] is offered for sale, at £15 to £40 and more an acre, according to its quality and its propinquity to water. The owner, supposing that he is no poor speculator, is a millionaire pasha in ten years, but the fellahs toil and moil as before for their Bey or their “compania,” and the Beduins see with astonishment what is lured forth out of the land (Falls 1913:341–342).

Much of the reclaimed land was held in large private estates owned by members of Egypt's royal family founded by Muhammad 'Ali or by other wealthy Egyptians or foreigners. Following the 1952 Revolution, these estates were divided and redistributed according to provisions set forth in the Agrarian Reform Laws of 1952, 1961, and 1969. Located largely within the Nile's floodplain in the delta, these lands remain highly productive—assuming they are not converted to nonagricultural uses that may bring money but neither food nor fodder.

Public Land Reclamation in the Deserts

Since the 1952 Revolution, land reclamation has continued, with the state extending Nile water into the deserts beyond the river's old floodplain. This extension requires not only the construction of canals but significant lifting of the water to higher elevations and, thus, the creation and maintenance of a complex and costly system of pumping stations. All of this basic irrigation infrastructure was, and continues to be, constructed and managed by the state. Other aspects of desert land reclamation have involved a mix of various types of public and private entities, with public entities predominating through the early 1970s and private or semi-private enterprises gaining importance thereafter.

Desert development specialist and advocate Adli Bishay (1993:302) characterizes the period of the 1950s and 1960s as "the golden age of [desert] land reclamation." About nine hundred thousand feddans were reclaimed, mainly in areas west of the delta but also east of the delta, at several sites near the valley in Upper Egypt, and in the Faiyum. This addition to Egypt's agricultural land base started soon after the Revolution and involved the creation of a bureaucratic infrastructure that both structured and mirrored this process of change. The ministry of land reclamation was charged with the overall administration of the development of new lands. However, four autonomous bodies were created to directly administer and carry out specific operations. The general authorities or organizations for land development, land reclamation, and desert development were created in the 1950s, while the authority for the utilization and development of reclaimed land was established in 1966 (El-Abd 1979:95). The military was also directly involved in desert land reclamation in some areas.

The general desert development organization was the civilian agency responsible for all activities in desert areas far removed from the Nile Valley (and the reader will encounter this important organization as the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* later on when the focus changes back to the northwest coast). The

other three bodies were responsible for civilian development in areas near the Nile Valley, where most reclamation took place during this period. The first step in this land reclamation was always taken by the general authority for land development, which selected the project area and then planned and designed the irrigation and drainage systems and related infrastructure. The management of building the infrastructure and carrying out land leveling and other related reclamation work was handed over to specialized companies. Most of these companies were Egyptian, but some were foreign; they all worked under the supervision of the general land reclamation organization. Since modern machinery was often out of commission due to lack of spare parts and poor maintenance, much of the arduous work required during this phase was provided by *tarabil* organized in large work gangs and contracted by the companies for relatively low wages. Living in austere conditions, many young and a few older men from the Nile Valley dug the canals and leveled the desert land with hoes of ancient design and other simple tools (Toth, personal communication: 1994).

Bishay (1993:306) cogently argues that studies of soil characteristics, water quality, fertilizer requirements, and other needs for crop production should have taken place at the beginning of the reclamation process. However, attention to cultivation and land improvement did not start until after completion of the irrigation and other physical infrastructure. Since these concerns were not factored into the design of projects, major alterations in the infrastructure had to be made in some areas. In some cases, soil quality was so poor that crop production could be achieved only after long, costly, and complex treatment. Supervision of these changes and upgrading was the special concern of the authority for the utilization and development of reclaimed land.

Who was to farm these reclaimed areas and how were they to be organized? We can note straight away that Bedouin living in and around land reclamation projects in the desert at this time were excluded from participation in the projects on the basis that they had no or little previous experience in agriculture. Thirty to forty years later in the 1990s, their exclusion from projects on what they consider ancestral land still rankles among at least some of the old desert dwellers, as the following statement by a man from the Jawabis Bedouin in Wadi Natrun indicates:

The main problem is that local people do not qualify for the government's land reclamation schemes. Migrants from the Nile Valley easily obtain the land and we receive nothing, even though the land is rightfully our inheritance (quoted in Sherbiny, Cole, and Girgis 1992:24).

Another example of local people excluded from a project concerns fisherfolk dislocated by reclamation of parts of Lake Mariut in the northwestern desert fringe of Bahaira governorate. Like the Bedouin, they had little or no background in farming, but a project press release stating that these people were only "a few fishermen who eke out a meager living" suggests that class prejudice and perhaps Nile Valley ethnocentrism were also factors in their exclusion, without compensation, from the new lands (Johnson and Lintner 1985:251).

Nubians were resettled at a land reclamation site near Kawm Umbu in Upper Egypt following dislocation from their homeland, which was inundated as a result of the High Dam at Aswan. Some refugees displaced by Israeli aggression in Sinai and the Suez Canal region were resettled in parts of Tahrir district and in areas east of the delta. However, the selection of other settlers was the subject of considerable controversy, as debates raged among personnel within higher echelons of the state about how the newly reclaimed lands should be managed and operated. One faction, with the blessing of the Soviet Union, argued for large-scale, centrally-controlled state farms or collectives. Another faction, with the blessing of the United States, favored a decentralized system with numerous smallholders operating their own farms but joined together in cooperatives. Both models were actually applied to one degree or another at different places. For example, the large state-farm model was especially associated with the early development phase in Tahrir district, while the cooperative/smallholder model was introduced in a project at Abis near Alexandria (Tadros 1978; Springborg 1979; Voll 1980; Hopkins et al. 1988:6-15).

Formal recruitment efforts were initiated by proponents of both models to select settlers from rural communities in the Nile Valley. Some potential farmer-settlers answered the call and met formal selection criteria, such as completion of military service, demonstrated experience in agriculture, and the absence of any criminal record. Some of these actually left the Nile Valley and went as pioneers into the new lands. However, no mass organized movement of settlers ever took place. Farm management and settlement policies changed and recharged during the 1950s and 1960s. Eventually, ambiguity prevailed—as public sector companies were established to operate farms for profit, and cooperatives intended to represent local producer interests were set up by outside political-party operatives and state officials. Settlers, meanwhile, informally selected themselves and moved into the areas in hopes of finding a job and/or obtaining access to a plot of land.

Undertaken with great enthusiasm and high hopes for creating a new Egypt in the desert, the public land reclamation of the 1950s and 1960s was a great disappointment to many. Large areas that had been prepared for agri-

culture were never cultivated or were abandoned after a few seasons. Settlements were bleak, and life was harsh for people who persevered. Few social services were available, and farming suffered from inadequate supplies of inputs and lack of proper marketing facilities—not to mention appropriate technologies for desert agriculture. By the early 1970s, public sector farms continued to operate with hired labor and cadres of resident employees, and some smallholders still worked the land. However, no bright future beckoned.

Privatization and New Desert Development

The decade of the 1970s marked a transition in desert development. Almost no additional land was reclaimed. Moreover, evaluation studies of desert land reclamation were conducted by influential foreign consultants (e.g., Voll 1978; 1980; Hunting Technical Services 1979; and Pacific Consultants 1980) and all came to the same conclusion: desert development is not economically viable. The costs of reclamation are too high and the yields too low to warrant further investment. Nonetheless, desert development was not abandoned by the state or by individual Egyptian citizens, although fundamental changes were introduced into this process of change. Landholdings in the reclaimed areas began to be privatized. New technologies and practices in desert agriculture were introduced. Plans were formulated for the creation of new cities in the desert. The development of tourism in desert areas by the private sector began to be encouraged. Also, major improvements in highways, roads, telecommunications, and the electrical supply system were initiated. These changes brought significant new dimensions to desert development and created the conditions for the current phase, which has many of the characteristics of a boom.

Reclaimed lands held and managed by public sector companies began to be distributed in the 1970s among various categories of landholders. One category is that of smallholders with three to five or six feddans. Many of these come from among the original workers on the projects. Another category that emerged is that of graduates of agricultural secondary schools and of universities who obtained distributions of twenty and thirty feddans, respectively. "White collar" employees of the public sector companies form another category, and they acquired holdings of between about fifteen and twenty feddans. Cooperatives, or civil associations, of various sorts were granted areas for distribution to their members, and relatively large tracts of land were sold, usually by auction, to private individuals and companies. Meanwhile the public sector companies retained land which they continue

to manage and farm (Voll 1980:144; Sukkary-Stolba 1985:183; Johnson and Lintner 1985:256–257; Hopkins et al. 1988:14–15).

Some landholdings were fully privatized, as owners obtained deeds from the state indicating ownership of the land as *mulk*, “private property.” Smallholders usually obtained their plots under leasehold, while the graduates and employees bought leases to the land with long-term mortgages extended by the state. Whether or not they obtained outright private ownership of the land, the new landholders—small, medium, and large—were all on their own to make use of the land as they saw fit, with mixed results.

Agronomist Muhammad ‘Atif Kishk (1994:5) summarizes these changes with a slightly different emphasis. He stresses that the conversion of reclaimed lands from state or public sector management to private or semi-private holdings occurred piecemeal and notes that the first distribution was to landless farmers from the Nile Valley. Later on, a decision was made to distribute some of the land to agronomists. Still later, public sector companies faced with deficits decided to sell part of the land “by auction to anyone who could afford to buy it, whether he intends to cultivate it, lease it, or sell it.” According to Kishk, “certain well-placed social categories,” such as military and police officers, judges, and university professors became owners of parts of the reclaimed land “for cultivation or commercial purposes.” Finally, in an attempt to remedy unemployment among university graduates, “the authorities distributed large areas . . . to [graduates].” In his assessment of this and other aspects of the desert land reclamation process, Kishk laments that decisions were seldom based on a thorough and comprehensive analysis of all relevant facts but were usually in response to changing political pressures emanating from within the Nile Valley. In his words,

These policies had their supporters and opponents, as well as their advantages and shortcomings, but there was no appropriate follow-up to allow for sound assessment. I would not be exaggerating or off-track if I said that approval or disapproval of such policies has been, and still is, a matter of opinion rather than a matter of data, information and facts based on [a] sound scientific approach (*ibid*:6).

It should be stressed that people who obtained reclaimed land benefited from the massive investments of the state and the labor of thousands of *tarabil* during the 1950s and 1960s. Many encountered constraints in terms of inadequate credit facilities, irregular water supply, and difficulties in marketing, obtaining inputs, and access to expertise and new technologies. However, without the basic infrastructure already in place, they could not have developed their farms. Some of these constraints have eased, and many

of these landholders contribute to the boom that has characterized desert development since the mid-1980s and during the 1990s.

Smallholders generally dedicated themselves with a passion to farming and are widely credited with high net returns per feddan cultivated. Production on lands distributed to graduates has had mixed results. Many of the graduates are rightly accused of not being serious, of neglecting the land they have acquired, and of trying to farm it as absentee owners. However, examples exist of hard work and dedication on the part of graduates and of resultant success. Significant failures have occurred among private investors who obtained relatively large tracts of land. However, investors with good access to financial capital, state-of-the-art technologies and expertise, and good management have achieved high levels of output and say they are satisfied with the returns on their investments (Sherbiny, Cole, and Girgis 1992:77–81; Bishay 1993:321–327, 333–338; Fitch 1994).

Since the mid-1980s, new desert agriculture has rapidly expanded. Private individuals and companies have rushed to buy both reclaimed and unreclaimed land in parts of the desert. Hundreds of new farms, large and small, have been developed. Specialized private companies have mushroomed to provide modern desert irrigation systems and other requirements for new desert agriculture. Meanwhile, the state has reinitiated reclamation projects by extending Nile water into north Sinai in the east and almost to 'Alamain in the west. About six hundred thousand feddans have officially been reclaimed since 1980.

The creation of planned cities in the desert added a major new dimension to the desert development process. Since the late 1970s, the Tenth of Ramadan, the Sixth of October, and the Fifteenth of May cities have been developed on desert lands east and west of Cairo. Sadat City was set up in the desert about halfway between Cairo and Alexandria, while New Nubariya, New 'Amriya, and New Burj al-'Arab have been established on desert sites not far from Alexandria. These cities were mainly designed as industrial centers, although agriculture and other activities were included in some cases such as Sadat City. They were specifically designated as locations for private sector joint ventures established under the *infatih*, or Open Door Economic Policy, initiated by President Anwar Sadat. Although the growth of their industrial bases started off slowly, these cities increasingly attract significant numbers of factories. Some are joint venture establishments or form part of the military production complex, but many are owned by local capitalists. These factories employ large numbers of both male and female workers from Cairo, Alexandria, and nearby communities in the Nile Valley.

The new cities have large stocks of housing, usually designed for low, middle, and high income occupants. However, much of this housing remains

vacant despite a major shortage of housing in the Nile Valley. Many workers and most employers commute from their old communities in the Nile Valley. Often the workers cannot afford the new housing built especially for low income groups, while the employers prefer to remain in their old residences in the main cities of Cairo and Alexandria (see Meyer 1989; Sewall 1992:103–115).

Yet the cities are maturing and increasingly attract residents, including people who now live there and commute to work in the Nile Valley. Also, nonindustrial enterprises are beginning to locate in the new cities. These include trade and other service establishments, but also private schools which find their uncrowded space a major asset. Among the latter is the American University in Cairo which in 1997 purchased desert land from the government of Egypt to build a new campus on terrain that was formerly part of the Eastern Desert. Meanwhile, spontaneous urban growth has occurred in numerous unplanned desert towns. Two examples are Wadi Natrun and Badr, both of which have mushroomed in size since the early 1980s. Informal trade and other services, once severely limited in the old reclamation projects and in the new cities when they were first built, have especially expanded in the unplanned desert towns.

Private sector tourism development was also added to the desert development matrix and has involved large-scale construction of hotels, tourist villages, and a huge stock of private holiday apartments, chalets, and villas on or near desert beaches. Moreover, numerous new enterprises have sprung up along the new desert highways that link Cairo to Ismailia, to Suez, and to Alexandria and also along a new desert ring-road that circles Cairo to the east. New highways, new cities, new factories, and new tourism facilities have engaged the construction sector on a massive scale. Not surprisingly, construction contributes to the current boom in desert development, as both large-scale and small-scale contractors have rushed to build in the desert.

An Interpretation

Our reading of the more than forty-year-old desert development experience in areas near the Nile Valley concludes that the role of the Egyptian state has been enormous. The state opened these areas to development by providing basic infrastructure in the form of canals and pumping stations, roads and highways, electricity, planned settlements in land reclamation areas and the new cities, and the creation of industrial zones. The quality, appropriateness, and maintenance of this infrastructure is subject to critical evaluation. However, without the state's contribution of this infrastructure, these areas

would probably still be closed to settlement and to agriculture, industry, and most other economic activities.

The role of Egyptian people also has been enormous, as their knowledge and institutional arrangements have shaped the development in multiple ways. Many newcomers have struggled in an unfamiliar environment with little or no technical advice from experts and a minimum of effective support from financial institutions. They also have confronted numerous rules and regulations set forth by various bureaucracies and even the military, which has primary legal rights to undeveloped land in the deserts of Egypt. Some of the newcomers failed to achieve their goals and abandoned the desert. Others have survived as a result of an informal process of trial and error and by copying apparent successes achieved by others.

Observation and results of partial surveys, such as the Sherbiny, Cole, and Girgis (1992) study, support the above conclusions and suggest others. Nile Valley people predominate in this desert development and come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds: retired military officers and well-to-do businessmen, upper-middle-class professionals and lower-middle-class employees, urban and rural workers, small-scale farmers from villages, and traders from small towns and cities. University graduates and the illiterate are there, as are both Muslims and Christians. Socially, the new desert development mirrors Nile Valley Egypt to a significant degree—but without significant unemployment or the very poor. The survey data also show that Bedouin, once excluded from early projects, are now engaged alongside their compatriots from the Nile Valley in many aspects of the more recent desert development (*ibid*:13–18).

The desert has new settlers, along with commuters and absentee investors. Individuals, families, civil associations or cooperatives, and companies moved quickly once the state relaxed central control of development activities in these areas. Job opportunities attracted workers. Tax exemptions and relatively cheap land encouraged investors to risk their capital in the desert. Merchants and traders saw potential sales and came with their goods and services. Survey results suggest that industry has especially provided formal job opportunities. Trade and other services, such as repairs, tend to be small-scale and informal; but they engage increasingly large numbers of people in new desert communities. The new desert agriculture, whether from the 1950s and 1960s or of more recent vintage, utilizes considerable family labor in the case of smallholders. Medium-sized and large farms employ modest numbers of men with formal studies in agriculture at secondary school and university levels, along with some full-time farm workers. However, much of the labor required in new desert agriculture is provided by *tarahil* recruited by labor contractors from among residents of old

Nile Valley communities. These laborers, who include large numbers of women and some children, are transported to the desert farms and work there on a temporary basis to perform specific tasks (*ibid*:29–39, 50–53, 56–58).

New desert enterprises face some constraints that are specific to their desert locations. Water shortages, costly and inadequate transport, and problems with land tenure and ownership especially plague desert enterprises. Other constraints and problems are not unique to the desert. Employers complain about high wage rates demanded by laborers, the absence of specialized skills, and lack of worker commitment and loyalty. Workers, by contrast, see themselves as vulnerable to employers' whims in a weak labor market with few job opportunities and complain about low wages and meager benefits for long hours of work. Lack of appropriate machinery, spare parts, and maintenance plagues enterprises in the desert as is the case elsewhere in Egypt. Inadequate supplies of inputs and problems with marketing of output abound in the desert but also exist in the Nile Valley. Finance and credit, permits and licensing, and taxes provide major problems for small- and medium-scale investors in the desert but are not seen as constraints by investors with large-scale operations there. Thus, "connections" between investors and the authorities and financial institutions would seem to vary on the basis of size of investment and not on the basis of desert versus Nile Valley locations (*ibid*:60–72).

Profits and jobs have strongly motivated the new desert development. However, workers and capitalists also mention lack of crowding, clean air, and quietness as major attractions of the desert. Survey results further suggest improvements in social services in desert communities since the middle to late-1980s, but they also indicate that many settlers consider health care and education to be especially inadequate. Nonetheless, many Nile Valley people living and working in the desert say they would encourage their relatives and friends to migrate there (*ibid*:18–20, 56).

Some people are highly enthusiastic about the future of desert development. For example, a Nile Valley man with significant investment in new desert agriculture in South Tahrir commented that "the desert is the only hope for Egypt, for its young people and investment." An industrialist with a factory in Sadat City said, "It is our belief that Egypt is the desert. The Nile Valley was Egypt's past" (quoted in *ibid*:80–81). Meanwhile Kishk (1994:5) argues that Egyptians see desert development "as a matter of life and death, the success or feasibility of which should not be assessed in terms of narrow professional criteria of economic feasibility studies." Despite the hyperbole, these views suggest the importance of desert development to Egypt and its people.

How important is desert development in quantitative terms? To what degree does the new desert agriculture contribute to national food security and at what cost? Which economic activity generates the most jobs or has the greatest potential to draw new settlers into desert communities? How many people have migrated from the Nile Valley and settled there and what is the total population of all people living beyond the floodplain of the Nile in these desert terrains? Comprehensive data do not exist to provide precise answers to such questions (El-Hamamsy 1979:vii; Fitch 1994).

Although not fully recorded on Egypt's statistical map, development in deserts near the Nile Valley is a reality. Consider the Cairo-Alexandria desert highway. Until around the mid-1980s, most Cairenes with cars were apprehensive about taking the desert route to Alexandria. The old desert highway was narrow and had a bad reputation for accidents. Moreover, upon leaving the pyramids area, one was abruptly plunged into a vast yellowish brown landscape apparently devoid of life. Few cars traveled the road, and the only sites along the way were a bleak prison and a rather dingy rest house with a dilapidated filling station. People inevitably stopped at the rest house to briefly recuperate from the hazards of desert travel. However, relief only began to come as one neared Alexandria and saw some green fields, a signal of safe arrival back to civilization.

The desert highway is now a dual-lane toll-road. Trees watered by drip irrigation line long stretches of the way. Lush green fields watered by sprinkler and other modern irrigation systems cover most of the old desert terrain. Large villas, some with massive gates, dot the landscape. The prison and the old rest house are still there, but one hardly notices them as four or five luxurious cafeterias and restaurants have sprung up and attract travelers for a snack or a full meal. Supermodern filling stations are conveniently located along the way and are superclean, with uniformed attendants. Sadat City looms in the distance about halfway to Alexandria. But Alexandria seems to have moved closer to Cairo as one quickly reaches its new suburbs of New Nubariya and New 'Amriya. This is not a desert highway anymore, despite its name. Payphones that work exist every few kilometers. And thousands of cars, many of them airconditioned, speed along the highway—unless they are caught in radar traps. Indeed, the only apprehension the Cairene driver today encounters on the "desert" highway is being stopped by the police for speeding.

Time does not permit a detailed tour along the back roads of desert development areas near the Nile Valley. However, anthropologist Nicholas S. Hopkins et al. (1988:4–6; 53–99) demonstrate that community formation in South Tahrir has advanced from simply a plan put forward by the state to established communities, each with its own complex local organization and

specific identity. A symbolic affirmation of their sociocultural existence as communities and not just living quarters for transient workers and employees is the creation of local cemeteries and burial associations. The dead are no longer taken back for burial in communities of origin in the Nile Valley such that “human sociability among the living [in the new communities is] projected into the world of the dead” (*ibid*:95). To mention but one other aspect which suggests the maturity of this desert transformation, we cite agroforestry scientist Hosni El-Lakani’s (1994:49–50) documentation of the vital role played by trees and shrubs as windbreak systems for land cultivation and settlements in “the harsh environmental conditions which include strong desiccating winds, extreme temperatures, low air and soil moisture, and high solar radiation.” Thus with their windbreaks and shaded areas, cemeteries, modest social services, green fields or factories, trading outlets and repair shops, mosques and an occasional church, the smaller and larger communities now project an aura of permanency and robust vitality that was no more than a dream four short decades or so ago.

People here contribute to Egypt’s national economy and sustain their own livelihoods. In our estimation, the development that has been achieved is much more than a bandaid or an aspirin for the problems of the Nile Valley. Desert development, however, is not the only solution for perceived problems in Egypt. The Nile Valley is not Egypt’s past and the desert its future. Both environments are part of the past and the present; people struggle in both areas to survive amid hopes for a better future and a growing awareness that Egypt’s dependency on a limited supply of water poses a huge question mark for long term ecological sustainability in the ancient land. Except for meager rainfall in parts of desert Egypt, the country’s total water supply in 1990 amounted to 63.5 billion cubic meters, with 55.5 billion from the Nile. Total demand for water in 1990 reached 59.2 billion cubic meters (Abu-Zeid 1994; Bishay 1992:56–59). Meanwhile demand accelerates—to quench the thirst of a growing population, to meet the needs of expanding industrial and tourism sectors, and to irrigate new fields in the desert.

In conclusion, ours is an anti-essentialist view of Egypt’s deserts and desert development. Where many see a vast divide between desert and sown, we see a long history of interaction that has recently accelerated rapidly in magnitude and in scope. Many see desert development as development of the desert through land reclamation for crop production. We view the process more as development *in* the desert and see a multiplicity of economic activities and a mixture of formal and informal organization. Where a few see

desert development as Nile Valley people taking over ancestral lands of the Bedouin and where many ignore the Bedouin, we see both categories of people engaged in this process of change. In some cases, the new desert development competes with ancient arid range production; but much of the new development has taken place in very dry areas that were not of significant use to anybody. Some equate desert development with forty years of change in areas near the Nile Valley, but we see the process also taking place in areas remote from the Nile Valley and over a longer span of time. With this background in place, we now turn back to one of those "remote" areas, the northwest coast.

CHAPTER 2

The People of Matruh: Arab Bedouin and Sons of the Nile Valley

The northwest coast displays moderate sociocultural diversity, as people there divide themselves into two main categories: Arabs and Sons of the Nile Valley. A few others with non-Egyptian backgrounds in Sudan, Libya and other North African countries, and Greece also contribute to the diversity. Moreover, each of the two main categories has multiple subdivisions based on tribe and descent status among the Arabs and on length of residence in Matruh and community background for the Sons of the Nile Valley. The people called Arabs by themselves and others can be designated as Bedouin, although “*badu*”—from which the English “Bedouin” derives—is rarely heard in the northwest coast. Sons of the Nile Valley, whom we identify as settlers, are also called *wafidin*, “migrants,” and *misriyin*, “Egyptians,” by themselves and others.

“*Misriyin*” in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world denotes citizens of the Arab Republic of Egypt. However, the term has more narrow usages and sometimes refers to either local inhabitants of the Nile Valley between Aswan and the Mediterranean or to residents of Cairo. “*Misriyin*” in the northwest coast context means Nile Valley folk and does not imply that Bedouin in the region are not Egyptian citizens. Conversely, the appellation of “Arab” to the Bedouin and not to others does not mean that the Sons of the Nile Valley and people from other Arab countries are not considered Arabs in the wider non-Bedouin meaning of that term.

Labeling of people is fraught with difficulties, especially when terms have multiple meanings and usages. Moreover, the designation of settlers from the Nile Valley as *wafidin* is highly resented by some people in this category, but the term is widely used in the northwest coast. Generally, we refer to the newcomer settlers as Sons of the Nile Valley and to the region’s Arabs as Bedouin. When quoting statements by local people, we use the labels they used or provide a literal translation.

This chapter introduces people in the northwest coast as they presented themselves to us. Aspects of their histories appear, because when we asked

them to tell us about themselves, they responded with discourses about the past. These histories thus form part of their identities. We did not specifically ask Bedouin to tell us about their tribal frameworks, but they called attention to their tribes, clans, and lineages. We did not probe Sons of the Nile Valley about ties they have to their communities of origin or their participation in voluntary associations established in Matruh, but the importance of these ties and associations emerged from their own discourse. We did ask Bedouin to tell us about a status differential we knew to exist among them. They did not raise the issue but responded with enthusiasm once we mentioned it.

The Awlad 'Ali

We are Awlad 'Ali ["Sons of 'Ali"] and we came from Najd in the fourth century of the Hijra. Our history is not written, but this is what our fathers and grandfathers told us.

An elderly senior from the 'Ashaibat clan of the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar tribe thus introduced himself and his people to us. The Awlad 'Ali are not the only Bedouin in the northwest coast, but they predominate numerically and in other aspects of status within the region. The Awlad 'Ali are also the most widely known desert people in Egypt. Moreover, many of them have long been settled in various Nile Valley governorates, while others live in eastern Libya.

The elderly senior's assertion that Awlad 'Ali ancestors hail from Najd in central Arabia clearly signals Arab descent and can be viewed as indicating an overarching Arab identity that transcends the particularity of the local region where the Awlad 'Ali happen to live today. At the same time, a thousand years of being in the region or in nearby areas stakes out a strong claim to ancient rights in this part of the Arab world. This senior and many others state that the Awlad 'Ali are descendants of the Bani Sulaim, who first arrived in the region during the eleventh century. Their claim is generally substantiated in written sources (Murray 1935:275; Evans-Pritchard 1949:48–49; Obermeyer 1968:5; and Mohsen 1975:11). However, some variations are expressed about their origins and when they arrived from Arabia. For example, one elderly senior said, "We came from the Arabian Peninsula either with the Islamic conquest or with the Bani Hilal."

Leaving aside the possibility of their having come with the first Arab Muslims in the seventh century C.E., we note that the Bani Sulaim and the Bani Hilal are closely related to each other through a common ancestor,

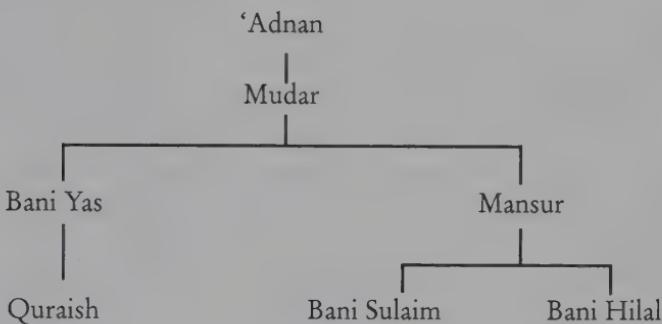


Figure 2. Genealogical Relations of the Bani Sulaim and Bani Hilal

Mansur, who was a descendant of Mudar. The Bani Yas, from whom sprang the Prophet Muhammad's tribe of Quraish, are also descendants of Mudar, who was himself a descendant of 'Adnan, the founder of the '*arab al-musta'arab*, "Arabized Arabs" (Figure 2). Whether they are descended from Bani Sulaim or from Bani Hilal is of no practical importance today, except that either set of these ancestors provides the Awlad 'Ali with a link to a noble and illustrious past. Having ancestors who participated in the Islamic conquest is even more glorious.

Although recognized as being of noble lineage, the Bani Sulaim and the Bani Hilal are nonetheless subjects of controversy. According to Ibn Khaldun (1925:28–51; 134–153), both tribes continued to practice a nomadic pastoralist way of life in the deserts of Arabia at the time of the Abbasids. The Bani Sulaim mainly used pastures in the vicinity of al-Madina, while most of the herding activities of the Bani Hilal took place near at-Ta'if. However, both groups sometimes went to summer camps on the borders of Iraq and Syria,

from whence they made incursions into neighboring areas to rob travelers and to pillage caravans. The Sulaim even allowed themselves to attack pilgrims to Makka . . . and caused havoc in the area around Madina when they [the pilgrims] visited the tomb of the Prophet (*ibid*:29).

Both tribes, according to Ibn Khaldun, joined the Qarmatian sectarian movement soon after it appeared and served as its militia in the provinces of Bahrain and Oman. After the subjugation of Egypt and Syria by the Fatimids (in the tenth century C.E.), the Bani Sulaim and the Bani Hilal were

brought into Upper Egypt under the auspices of the Fatimid ruler, al-'Aziz, and were installed on the east bank of the River Nile. However, historian Jamil M. Abun-Nasr (1987:69) indicates they came into Egypt as early as the eighth century C.E. and were "the cause of much turbulence in public life."

Faced with rebellion and rioting in many parts of North Africa and also concerned about the threat of the Bani Sulaim and the Bani Hilal to the stability of his rule in Egypt, the Fatimid caliph, al-Mustansir, enlisted both tribes to participate in campaigns to restore order in North Africa. In return, he granted them rights in North Africa, including the allocation of specific provinces and towns to their various sections and chiefs. According to Abun-Nasr, about fifty thousand tribal warriors, plus women and children, set out for North Africa in 442 A.H. (1050/1051 C.E.). According to Ibn Khaldun, the Bani Sulaim concentrated their activities in the areas from the west of Alexandria to Tripolitania, with many of them settling in the Jabal al-Akhdar area of ancient Cyrenaica in eastern Libya. The Bani Hilal concentrated their efforts farther westward, especially in Tunisia. When speaking of the exploits of their ancestors, the Awlad 'Ali today often say they went to Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Andalucia and then returned to Libya from whence they eventually came back into Egypt.

The involvement of these groups in North Africa has been criticized. Abun-Nasr (1987:69) writes of the Fatimids' "unleashing the Arabian nomads . . . upon the Maghrib," while economist Samir Amin states that,

The hordes were let loose . . . [and] [t]he smiling Berber countryside disappeared forever, the irrigation works were destroyed, and the villages disappeared soon after, as the old settled population died out or took refuge in the hills (1970:16).

Ibn Khaldun, well-known for his antipathy to nomads, refers over and over again to their looting and pillage and the devastation they brought about: "They descended on Africa like a swarm of locusts, overwhelming and destroying everything they found along their path" (1925:34).

Historically, North Africa experienced significant political upheaval and economic decline during this period. However, the degree to which this was specifically caused by the Bani Sulaim and Bani Hilal nomads is open to question. They clearly engaged in numerous battles, defeated their opponents, and pillaged and looted. However, the area was already in turmoil before they entered it, and the massive destruction of the countryside and of large-scale irrigation works for which they are singled out for blame seems exaggerated. Indeed, historian Jean P. Poncet (1967) attributes much of the destruction that took place to various bands of local marauders, who were

unrelated to the Arab nomads, and to activities by some of the local rulers against rebellious groups.

As mentioned, the Awlad 'Ali say their ancestors returned back to Egypt from Libya. This return probably began sometime in the seventeenth century C.E. The Awlad 'Ali maintain close genealogical ties to a number of tribes based in eastern Libya. As Evans-Pritchard (1949:49; 51) shows, they share a common ancestor, 'Aqqar, with the Harabi and the Sharai'. These descendants of 'Aqqar join together with the Jibarna and Bani Sallam groupings of tribes as descendants of Sa'ada, a daughter of the Bani Sulaim. Obermeyer (1968:5), however, notes that his Awlad 'Ali informants in Qasr "refer to their ancestress, Sa'ada, as *al-Hilaliyya*, 'she of the Banu Hilal.'"

The return of the Awlad 'Ali to Egypt was apparently triggered by a combination of factors. These include conflict in Cyrenaica with their cousins, the Harabi, who pressured them to migrate out of Libya (Evans-Pritchard 1949:49). According to Murray (1935:276), they came into Egypt at the request of the Jumi'at, who asked them to fight on their behalf against the Hanadi. Both of these reasons were given to us by an elderly senior, who said,

There was warfare between the Awlad 'Ali and the Harabi in Libya. Meanwhile the Jumi'at were paying tribute in the desert of Egypt to the Hanadi. The Jumi'at asked the Awlad 'Ali to help them against the Hanadi. The Awlad 'Ali replied that they could not help them because they were exhausted from their war with the Harabi. However, the Jumi'at said they would provide the Awlad 'Ali with arms. They said, "Just help us get rid of these people." So, they gave the Awlad 'Ali arms; and the Awlad 'Ali came and defeated the Hanadi and removed them from the area. The Awlad 'Ali then exempted the Jumi'at from the payment of tribute.

General agreement exists between written sources and the oral history presented by both younger and older men of the Awlad 'Ali that the Awlad 'Ali defeated the Hanadi and pushed them out of the northwest coast. It is not exactly clear, however, when the Awlad 'Ali came back into Egypt. One senior said, "Awlad 'Ali returned here recently, about three hundred years ago." This would have been at the end of the seventeenth century. Murray (1935:276) says they began to drift eastward out of Cyrenaica "about 150 years ago," which would have been sometime in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The Awlad 'Ali say they participated in the resistance to the French invasion of Egypt, which took place in 1789. Moreover, Murray (*ibid*) reports three references by al-Jabarti to the Awlad 'Ali in Egypt during the first decade of the nineteenth century. The first reference is to a *firman*

in 1801, which confirmed various groups in their occupation of territories in Bahaira. One of these groups was the Afrad, a clan of the Awlad 'Ali al-Abiad. The second reference mentions the Awlad 'Ali defeating the combined forces of Muhammad 'Ali and of the Hanadi near Hawsh 'Isa in 1808. Al-Jabarti's third reference is to Muhammad 'Ali agreeing to meet leaders of the Awlad 'Ali from Bahaira in 1810.

When these leaders came to meet the Pasha of Egypt in Alexandria, he had them arrested but, later on, gave them "robes of honor." That Muhammad 'Ali gave them robes of honor means that he had engaged them as officials in his service. Meanwhile, their Hanadi enemies were resettled in Sharqiya. And some of the Awlad 'Ali became firmly entrenched in parts of Bahaira, while many others established themselves across the territories of the northwest coast. Some of the Awlad 'Ali also remained in eastern Libya.

The Awlad 'Ali take pride in recounting aspects of their history in Egypt. They especially mention their ancestors' roles in support of Muhammad 'Ali's efforts to establish control in the Nile Valley and in some of his wars in other Arab territories, especially in Najd and Sudan. In the words of an Awlad 'Ali senior,

Some things are not recorded in history, but we know them well. One of those things is that we fought alongside Muhammad 'Ali Pasha and defeated the Mamluks. The Arabs are known to ride horses and to fight wars. We, the Awlad 'Ali, defeated the Mamluks in Upper Egypt.

Another senior concurred and explained further that,

Muhammad 'Ali Pasha used to ask help from the Arab tribes. There was a rebellion against him in the Sa'id [Upper Egypt], and we fought with him. Our grandfathers fought with Ibrahim Pasha in Sudan. We also went with Ibrahim Pasha to fight in Arabia to support the Ashraf. Egypt did not want the Wahhabiya [a religious reform movement]. The Wahhabiya hit us on our heads; they are not easy. We have people who mention the Wahhabiya in our poetry.

History forms an important element of identity among the Awlad 'Ali and is especially used by senior males when they present themselves to outsiders. Like other Bedouin, the Awlad 'Ali also participate in an identity structure based on patrilineality and the segmentation of descent groups. Awlad 'Ali itself is an identity constructed in terms of the language of genealogy rather than, say, place of origin or residence, as is often the case among Nile Valley people—especially those from Lower Egypt. Although genealogy can be,

and is, used by the Awlad 'Ali to provide links to other people now resident in other parts of Egypt and in Libya, they usually identify themselves as simply Awlad 'Ali to outsiders—be they people from the Nile Valley, other Arabs, or foreigners.

Yet Awlad 'Ali often say, "We are *qaba'il* ["tribes"]," and further indicate that these *qaba'il* are Awlad 'Ali al-Abiad (the "Whites"), Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar (the "Reds"), and Sinaina. The Awlad 'Ali al-Abiad *qabila*, "tribe," has territories that are mainly located in the eastern part of Matruh, while those of the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar *qabila* are mainly in the west; but this territorial division is not absolute. The Sinaina *qabila* has territories scattered in locations from east to west across the northwest coast. These three *qaba'il* are each further divided into smaller segments which the Awlad 'Ali also call *qaba'il*.

To avoid confusion, these smaller *qaba'il* can be dubbed "clans." Each of these segments is identified by the use of the plural form of a patronym. Thus the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar divide themselves into the 'Ashaibat, Qinaishat, and Kamailat—which is to say the 'Ashaibis, Qinaishis, and Kamailis. This level of identity is especially important among the Bedouin themselves. They all know that the Qinaishat, say, are from Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar and that the Afrad, Azayim, Awlad Mansur, and Awlad Kharuf, among others, are from Awlad 'Ali al-Abiad, while the Mahafid, Qatifa, and others are from Sinaina. They seldom say among themselves that so-and-so is from this or that larger *qabila* (or tribe) but identify the person by the patronym of his or her smaller *qabila* (or clan). Each clan is further divided into a segment they call '*aila*, "family."

The '*aila* at this level of the descent system carries the name of an ancestor who existed at about five generations remove from living seniors. Most of these '*ailat*, "families," have a written document that indicates the membership of the '*aila* and sets forth agreements about shared responsibilities among the members. Generally, all males within an '*aila* who are old enough to fast are colliable for blood debts incurred as a result of the action or actions of any member of this segment. Moreover, each '*aila* claims collective rights to specific tracts of land, and many of its members reside in and make use of such territories. We stress, however, that an '*aila* is defined in terms of genealogy and not in terms of place. Thus an individual may reside separately from most of the rest of the '*aila* and abandon or sell rights to the land without losing membership in the unit. These '*ailat* can be considered as constituting maximal lineages.

'*Ailat* are divided into yet smaller segments called *biyut*, "houses," by the Awlad 'Ali. Like larger segments, they are identified by patronyms. Each *bait*, "house," has an '*aqila*, "wise man," responsible for maintaining order

within his own *bait*. He especially plays the principal role in dispute settlement, usually in collaboration with other '*awaqil*, "wise men," from within his '*aila*. Many anthropologists would probably consider the *biyut* to be minimal lineages. They are further subdivided into extended families called '*ailat*, the same term Awlad 'Ali use to designate maximal lineages. At the lowest level of the system are households, which are identified by the same term that designates minimal lineages.

We summarize this system from the smallest unit to the largest collectivity, as follows: a *bait* (household), an '*aila* (extended family), a *bait* (minimal lineage), an '*aila* (maximal lineage), a *qabila* (clan), a *qabila* (tribe), and the Awlad 'Ali.

Households sometimes consist of a husband and wife and their children. More commonly, households are composed of more than one conjugal family. A senior man and his wife or wives live together with their unmarried sons and daughters and their married sons and their wives and children. However, if a man marries a second wife, he may establish another household for this wife and her children. A divorced wife sometimes lives in a separate household with her sons and their wives and children. Households sometimes join in what they call a *jumla*, "trust;" "partnership," which involves the pooling of resources and income of the participants and/or the joint holding of an inheritance under the general management of the unit's senior man.

The household and, where it exists, the *jumla* are the basic units of this system. None of the various segments at higher levels exists as a standing corporate group for everyday, ordinary situations and events. The descent-based segmentary system is associated with territoriality but does not perfectly mirror the distribution of these Bedouin in the region. The system is also associated with '*urf*, with which the Awlad 'Ali strongly identify themselves; however, religion and the state also play roles in the settlement of disputes and provide legal concepts and procedures that exist alongside those of the '*urf*. Also, and as we will see later on, tribes and clans play roles in "elections" to various bodies in the governorate.

The segmentary framework described here uses the idiom of patrilineal kinship. Descent through women is seldom the subject of public discourse among the Awlad 'Ali; but matrilateral ties can be, and often are, very important. Also, and as anthropologists have long known, kin-based systems of this type seldom, if ever, reflect actual biological descent. About sixty years ago, Murray (1935:271) noted that "a traveller will not find anyone in the Western Desert to admit that he is not of pure Arab descent." However, a man from the Sons of the Nile Valley settled in Marsa Matruh said, "The Bedouin here are not really from Arabia, as they claim. They are from North

Africa, Berbers." When one of us mentioned this assertion in a conversation with a young lawyer from the Awlad 'Ali, he quickly responded that this was not true. However, he and the anthropologist noted that considerable physical variation exists among the Bedouin population in the area: green, blue, and brown eyes; blond, brown, and black hair; and light and dark complexions. His reflections are paraphrased as follows:

Perhaps we have some Berber ancestors, and some other ancestors. But the only language we know is Arabic. Also, the Arabic spoken by the Awlad 'Ali is close to that spoken in Arabia. We have many expressions that are very close to the language of the Holy Qur'an. And we all think of ourselves as Arabs. Even the Sanaqra from the Awlad 'Ali al-Abiad consider themselves Arabs, although it is stated in a famous poem that their ancestor, Sinqir, came from Crete.

How can we ever know our real history? Maybe Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Batuta have written about it; and I search for their writings every time I go to Alexandria. What I believe to be true, in our own case, is what goes back about five generations to Ma'fas [his maximal lineage founder] and his migration from Libya. I also know that he married a wife from the Masamir [tribe] in Libya. Her sons were very tall and very strong and they took the land because they were powerful. We are descended from them.

But who was here before? Did all our ancestors come from Najd, as my uncles say? When I was in France once, no one took me for a Saudi Arabian; most thought I was Spanish or Greek or Lebanese. Maybe we are part Berbers. There is no shame in being a Berber. But our ways, our language, our thinking, our '*urf* is Arab.

Few others of the Awlad 'Ali would question their origins. To them, their descent is real. What is important is that this system of descent and the segments associated with it are part of what they know—a part of their culture. Along with their '*urf*, their dialect, and their clothing, it provides an element in their identity; it also provides a framework in which action takes place. The "possession" of a segmentary descent system is something they share with other Bedouin in the area; its "possession" is also a feature which differentiates them from the Sons of the Nile Valley. However, their lives and their actions are not totally ordered by this system. They are also affected by Islam, by the actions and inactions of the state, by the market, and by many other factors that have nothing to do with kinship.

The Jumi'at and Other Bedouin

The second largest Bedouin component of the people of Matruh are the Jumi'at. They are said to be descended from Ka'b, who was a descendant of the Bani Sulaim. As such, they would be descended from an earlier branch of the Bani Sulaim than the Awlad 'Ali. Other tribes said to share the same ancestor, Ka'b, are the Awlad Sulaiman and the Qit'an (Murray 1935:280–281). Mohsen (1975:11–12) lists the Jumi'at as descendants of 'Aqqar along with the Awlad 'Ali and the Harabi, but then states that many of her informants said that the Jumi'at are descendants of Khadija, a sister of 'Ali and Harb, which would indicate a different patriline from that of the Awlad 'Ali. She also notes that many of the Awlad 'Ali "deny any genealogical connection to the [Jumi'at]."

One Bedouin with whom we spoke said, "The Awlad 'Ali are four tribes, the Sinaina, the 'Ali al-Abiad,' the 'Ali al-Ahmar, and the Jumi'at." This man is from a small tribe that is neither from the Awlad 'Ali nor the Jumi'at. His linkage of the Jumi'at to the Awlad 'Ali was strongly denied by an Awlad 'Ali senior who said, "The Jumi'at are not from Awlad 'Ali. They are a big tribe, but they are not from Awlad 'Ali." Another Awlad 'Ali senior said, "The Jumi'at are separate, different from the Awlad 'Ali. They are by themselves. The Jumi'at are numerous, many, as if they were a fourth section." The Jumi'at themselves agree with the Awlad 'Ali seniors about their separate descent.

Wide agreement exists that the Jumi'at were present in the northwest coast before the arrival of the Awlad 'Ali and, indeed, have a very long history of living along the coast, in the Mariut area, and in parts of Bahaira. Prior to the arrival of the Awlad 'Ali, they were forced to pay tribute to the Bani 'Una and were harassed by the Hanadi. Both the Bani 'Una and the Hanadi hail from the Bani Sallam and are thus collateral relatives of the Awlad 'Ali. As noted earlier, the Awlad 'Ali recount that they came to the aid of the Jumi'at, defeated their own relatives, and then exempted the Jumi'at from the payment of tribute.

Today, the Jumi'at include some of the most successful and well-connected entrepreneurs in the area, have a small cadre of well-educated young men, and count among their members the first Bedouin from Matruh to hold a high-level local government office (the head of the Marsa Matruh city council). They also include some who are relatively poor. Like the Awlad 'Ali tribes, the Jumi'at are divided into different clans—including Shtur, Qawasim, Awlad Musa, and others. Other small tribes and clans dot the region and live in its towns and capital city. Examples are the Samalus,

Qit'an, Mu'aliq, Sharasat, Awarma, and Siraihat. These people and the Jumi'at all follow the same general customs as the Awlad 'Ali. Indeed, Mohsen (1975:18) argues that all the different Bedouin groups recognize the Awlad 'Ali *daraibat* and *'awaiyid*, "tribal law and customs," as the "binding set of rules regulating behavior within the area . . . and it is in terms of the jurisdiction of these rules that Awlad 'Ali are treated as a unit by the Egyptian government."

Perhaps the Egyptian government considers the Awlad 'Ali proper and all the other Bedouin groups of the northwest coast as one and the same, as Mohsen asserts. However, the Bedouin of the area recognize significant differences among themselves, although they widely agree that changes are taking place. One of the important differences they recognize is the status differentiation between Sa'dawi and *murabit*.

The Sa'ada and the Murabtin

The existence of a division among the Bedouin components of the people of Matruh is a sensitive issue, especially for those categorized as *murabtin* (sg., *murabit*). The continuation of this division is also not favored by the Egyptian government. In this section, we first present voices of *murabtin* and then follow with points of view expressed by men from the Sa'ada (sg., Sa'dawi). As previously mentioned, Sa'ada is the name of a woman usually said to be a descendant of the Bani Sulaim. She is the ancestress of three major groupings of tribes: the Jibarna, the 'Aqaqra, and the Bani Sallam which link together twelve major tribes, including the Awlad 'Ali. Her descendants today live in Libya and in the Egyptian governorates of Matruh, Bahaira, Alexandria, Gharbiya, Sharqiya, Bani Suif, Minya, and the Faiyum (Evans-Pritchard 1949:49–50).

A literal translation of *murabtin* is "the tied;" but the term is also related to *ribat*, the outposts where Muslims congregated during the early spread of the Faith into North Africa. The first statement from a *murabit* is by a man about fifty-five years of age who is also a Haj. He lives in the steppe outside of Marsa Matruh and is a farmer and livestock raiser. When asked about the *murabtin*, he said,

If someone comes in and hits you, and you have the strength to hit back and you have the money, you would then be the Sa'dawi. I would be weak. And I would be under your protection, and you would feed me. And I would herd for you and help out in the household. That would be the *murabit*. Equivalent to the weak.

Nowadays, the *murabtin* have people who are working in ministries and as doctors. What remains are just the names. The Sa'ada do not have all the jobs. In the past, when the *murabit* killed another *murabit*, he would go to the Sa'dawi for protection. Now this does not happen. Today, employment is by education. The proper position for the proper person.

The second statement is by a man in his early forties, who lives in Marsa Matruh. He is a businessman and also owns a farm in the steppe. In reply to our request that he tell us about the *murabtin*, he said,

I am from the *murabtin*. The *murabtin* are tribes from different ancestors. Maybe they come from the Arabian Peninsula, from Yemen. But they are not all descended from the same ancestor like the Sa'ada. The Sa'ada are all related to each other like brothers. They had wars between each other, and that is why you find some of them in Libya and some of them here. The *murabtin* can also be from the Bani Sulaim. We have moved as far west as Spain. The difference between us and them is that they fought wars and we didn't.

When the Awlad 'Ali were about to be kicked out of Libya by their brothers and decided to come to Egypt, the person who planned for and financially supported their migration was a *murabit*. He went out to them, to help them and to encourage them. They also had assistance from Tripoli. When the Awlad 'Ali came into Egypt, *musharadin* ["uprooted"], the people who supported them were the Jumi'at. They supported them, and the Awlad 'Ali defeated the Hanadi. However, we also fought alongside the Awlad 'Ali in their war with the Hanadi; and the Git'an fought with them in that war, too. Also, 'Umar al-Mukhtar [a Libyan patriot who fought against the Italians] was a *murabit*.

We are now brothers with the Awlad 'Ali. We have lots of very strong friendships with them; and we like them. But that does not mean that we allow them to violate our rights. If one of them kills one of us, we kill one of them.

Any strong tribe these days can have the *nizala* [right under 'urf to provide refuge for up to a year to a group responsible for murder or serious assault]. The Jumi'at have the *nizala*. They took it last year, and now all the *murabtin* have the *nizala*. The *murabtin* everywhere now pay the *diyya* ["bloodwealth"].

The *murabtin* are peaceful people who have considerable wealth. In the past, they also had much wealth, especially in animals. If they were attacked, they would defend themselves; and the Sa'ada would fight for them. After that, the *murabtin* would share their animals with the Sa'ada who had supported them.

Statements from elderly seniors of the Awlad 'Ali, who are of unquestioned descent from Sa'ada, agree with some of the assertions made in the above statements. However, disagreements of "fact" and of interpretation exist. Moreover, the Sa'ada seniors, as was often the case, delved deep into history but did not always agree on important details of that history. One senior asserted that the *murabtin* are descendants of the original inhabitants of the northwest coast "who were ruled by the Romans and, before that, by the Greeks." They converted to Islam, he says, and were then protected by Arab Muslims in return for the payment of tribute. As he put it,

We have a saying, "the Awlad 'Ali and their *murabtin*." When the Arabs arrived here at the time of the Islamic conquest, each group took on people from among the local population, who were themselves divided into different groups. And the Arabs took *jizya* ["tribute"] from them. This was still going on three hundred years ago. But it no longer applies.

Another Sa'dawi senior insisted that the *murabtin* are not descendants of ancient peoples in the area. He said they are Arab in origin and are the descendants of people who were left behind during the Islamic conquest to secure and hold the region, while others carried the Faith as far west as Andalucia. He further explained that,

Mussolini made a *thawra* ["revolution"] in Italy and then came to Libya. He wanted to weaken the people in the desert here and in Libya. So, Mussolini said to the *murabtin*, "You are remnants of the Romans. The Sa'ada are ruling over you. They are just Arabs of the desert."

Some people believed Mussolini; but those tribes which had some consciousness did not believe him. And they said to him that they are Arabs. "We are of the Arabs of the Conquest." Those who did not believe Mussolini fought with 'Umar al-Mukhtar against Mussolini and all the Italians. At the end of their war, Mussolini set up a place in the desert for those who fought against him. He brought them there with their animals and left them to die. That was at al-'Aqaila, in Libya.

Those who had believed his story, that they were Romans, were not put in concentration camps. A few of them became Christians. Those who cooperated with him included both *murabtin* and Sa'ada. Some people cooperated with the Italians; but they were really forced to. They did not have much choice.

The Italians were hungry people, and they intruded into people's lives. And they even told the people that they were Italians and not Arabs. That is what they told the *murabtin*. "You are Romans, not desert Arabs." Not true!

The *murabtin* are Arabs. The Second World War liberated Libya from the Italians.

Sa'ada from the Awlad 'Ali agree with the *murabtin* that relations between the two statuses have changed. A Sa'dawi noted that "the privileges of Awlad 'Ali have ended, especially with the coming of the government." He said relations are those of friendship now; but he also said the *murabtin*

do not want to admit to what was actually going on. That is why they sometimes say they are from Awlad 'Ali. They do not want to recognize or admit to what existed in the past. In the past, the Sa'dawi had *imtiyaz* ["privileges," "rights"]. The *diyya* for killing a Sa'dawi was a hundred camels. A camel for four pounds, it would be four hundred pounds. If the man killed was a *murabit*, the *diyya* was three hundred pounds. If he was a slave, it was 150 pounds. Of course, the currency was worth more in those days. Today, they do as they please—thirty or forty thousand pounds. The statuses of the Sa'ada and the *murabtin* are now the same. The name remains, but the rights of the Sa'ada are not observed. Today, if someone is killed, you pay the same *diyya* without regards to his status. The government changed all that.

The *murabtin* tribes are not a few. They are many. Today, they get nominated or appointed to all sorts of positions in the bureaucracy and in the government. Also, they used to not put themselves forward in the elections, but now they do. Then, there is the *murabit bil baraka*. He is not like the ordinary *murabit*. He claims descent from the Prophet, from the Ashraf.

During a general discussion about change in the Matruh area, a well-known and highly regarded 'aqila from the Awlad 'Ali indicated that economic change has brought an end to important aspects of the Sa'ada-*murabtin* bifurcation and also affected the solidarity of relationships within specific tribal segments. In his words,

There are three Awlad 'Ali tribes. Each one had its own friends, its own followers [i.e., the *murabtin*]. They were very strong, Awlad 'Ali; and they had people following them. People followed 'Ali al-Ahmar. But today our leadership is not what it used to be. The followers have become more numerous than the 'Ali al-Ahmar. No one can say today that these *murabtin* belong to 'Ali al-Ahmar. These *murabtin* are known, they are *qaba'il*. In the past, for example, if I were the leader, everybody would follow. Today, things are different. I don't even know if my sons will follow me.

The Jumi'at are separate, different. They were not part of the entourage of any of the major sections of the Awlad 'Ali. However, they did not grant

nizala. Today, they are numerous. They have money. They have physicians and lawyers. What I described to you was in the past. The past has gone away.

Today, people who want *nizala* go to those with whom they feel most comfortable. The *nizala* is no longer limited to the Sa'ada, to Awlad 'Ali, as it was in the past. The *nizala* is for up to a year. You take refuge with people. Now, money dominates the world. Before, we did not have so much money. And life was simple. The sheep was for three pounds; today, it sells for 300 pounds.

Informal discussions and observations complement and add nuance to the statements recorded above. A female professional takes pride in being Bedouin and considers herself to be from Awlad 'Ali, who she says originally came from northern Arabia. However, her own small tribe is *murabit*, and she says they are from the original people who lived in the area before the Awlad 'Ali Sa'ada came back from Libya. She says the *murabtin* tend to be quiet and like to avoid *dawsha*, "trouble." By contrast, she says, the Sa'ada speak loudly, tend to be assertive, and can be rambunctious and rough.

Several young Sa'ada men said the Sa'ada are like the Americans, "protectors" who give orders—the world's policemen. One of these said the *murabtin* are like the Kuwaitis, rich but weak. Another felt the *murabtin* are perhaps more like the Third World. Hearing these comments, a Sa'dawi senior drew on his own experiences and asserted that the Sa'ada are like the English officers at the battle of 'Alamain, while the *murabtin* are like the Indian troops who followed the orders of the English. On the other hand, this man took exception to mention of 'Umar al-Mukhtar as an example of a brave *murabit* who fought; he said 'Umar al-Mukhtar led the resistance, but those who did the fighting were Sa'ada. The young Sa'ada and most of the older ones deny that the *murabtin*, including the Jumi'at, have the *nizala*. They insist that the *murabtin* may claim to have it, but that no one would ever go to them for refuge.

Many Sa'ada men have mothers and wives from the *murabtin* and the Jumi'at. This indicates intermarriage; but it is unusual for Sa'ada women to marry outside their own kin and status groups. Social interaction between the two statuses is easy and relaxed and is seldom marked by obvious signs of deference or special respect. However, most men socialize mainly with other men from their own kindreds and thus have little reason to cross the status line. Since women seldom leave their houses, socializing with women from other kindreds or different statuses is out of the question unless, as a result of marriage, a woman has moved into a household composed of people from a different background.

Many writers stress the divisiveness of the Sa‘dawi-*murabit* categorization and its inherent structuring of inequality (but see Davis 1977:135–139). Kennett (1925:24) states that the division provides “a very sharp line of demarcation which cannot be ignored.” Murray (1935:272; 274) calls the system “feudal” and says the *murabit* is a “vassal.” Mohsen (1975:22) says that the *murabtin* are “vassals or clients,” while L. Abu-Lughod (1986:79) refers to them as “clients.” A recent World Bank (1993:32) document also designates the *murabtin* as “vassals.”

The use of European folk terminology in different cultural settings is always problematic and, in this case, significantly distorts the local reality as perceived by people in the region. No feudal system exists in Matruh, or in eastern Libya where the same bifurcation is present. Whatever they may be, the *murabtin* are not vassals. The system, in the past, had aspects of clientage, but only “to a greater or lesser degree” according to Evans-Pritchard (1949:51). Moreover, the system has changed. Writing about seventy years ago, Kennett (1925:26) noted that “[m]ost signs of the original differences between these divisions have now disappeared.” Meanwhile, Evans-Pritchard (1949:51), almost fifty years ago, said the larger groups of *murabtin* “live independently [of] and pay no fees to [the Sa‘ada].” Although Awlad ‘Ali mentioned payment of “*jizya*” or “*khuwa*” (forms of tribute) in the past, none of the Sa‘ada specified what was actually paid. Some of the *murabtin* mentioned “sharing” their animals with Sa‘ada in return for their protection. Generally, the actual tribute paid is, at best, vaguely remembered.

Sa‘dawi and *murabit* are categories that exist locally, and they imply a differentiation in social status. The distinction is similar to the *qabili*, “tribal,” and *khadiri*, “nontribal” descent categories in Najd (Altorki and Cole 1989:23–24; 58–59) and to the distinction between the *ahl al-ibil*, “people of the camel,” and the *ahl ash-shawiya*, “people of the sheep,” as mentioned by Batatu (1985:383–384) in the case of Iraq. Despite their existence, such categories do not translate into either wealth or power in the local societies of today. Both categories have rich and poor and people with significant political influence and many without such influence. Moreover, some tribes of *murabtin* status have high political standing, such as the Qadhafa in Libya, while some Sa‘ada tribes have all but passed into oblivion, examples of which are the Bani ‘Una and the Hanadi in Egypt.

Sons of the Nile Valley

People from the Nile Valley have been involved in the territories of the northwest coast since the days of ancient Egypt. Many have come tem-

porarily as administrators, guards, traders, and workers. During the twentieth century and especially since about 1960, significant numbers have taken up permanent residence in the region. Those who have settled in Matruh are a component of its people and are here introduced.

At the outset, we note the existence of numerous military bases in the Matruh governorate. Along with a few large camps, the area is dotted with many small encampments of coast guards, border guards, and other military personnel. Some areas have also been set aside and developed as recreational centers and summer holiday facilities for officers and their families. Since the vast majority of Egyptians are from the Nile Valley, it follows that most of the personnel in these camps are Sons of the Nile Valley. Although physically present in the area, the troops and most of the officers have little social interaction with the people of Matruh. For this reason, and because we had no contact with them, we simply note their presence and pass on.

Numerous cases exist of women from the Nile Valley who are married to men from among the Bedouin. Many of these women come from Bahaira and are from families with Bedouin origins. The more prominent migration has been of men who first came on their own, decided to settle, and then brought their families to join them.

Of course, many men have come, and continue to come, without settling in the region. Only those who settle and establish themselves in the community are likely to think of themselves as people of Matruh and to be thought of as such by others. As indicated earlier, those who have settled mainly live in Marsa Matruh or other towns and make up about half of the region's urban population.

The first migrants from the Nile Valley who settled and are remembered arrived about seventy years ago in the 1920s. Descendants of these first settlers identify themselves as *wafidin min qadim*, "old migrants," and express strong ties to Matruh and to the Bedouin, as indicated in the statements that follow. A young man about thirty years old is a governorate employee and also owns a shop in the central market district of Marsa Matruh. After mentioning that his family hails from Cairo but has ancestral roots in Arabia, he said,

My grandfather came here when he was a young man. He was a smart man and did many interesting things. He was an employee [of the government] and chose the location of the central hospital. He also bought the lot where our shop is located and opened a small factory for making soap. And my grandfather introduced the *carretta* [a small cart pulled by a donkey and Marsa Matruh's ubiquitous "taxicab"]; he was the first to put it together. We have had land in Marsa Matruh since way back. For example, our house has

a deed that goes back to the time of the Mixed Courts in Egypt. It consists of four yellow pages, and I still have it.

I am from Matruh. This is my home. I studied in Alexandria. But the people I am tied to are the people of Matruh, who are the Bedouin and ourselves [the old migrants].

Another Son of the Nile Valley is in his forties and is a civil servant who also supervises a hotel/apartment complex built by a company for summer holiday use by its employees. He described the early migration, including that of his family, and made some comments about the Bedouin, as follows:

People came here before the 1920s, but they came on temporary missions and left upon the completion of their mission. They came as inspectors, administrators, or maybe as workers. The more or less permanent settlement of people from the Nile Valley started in the twenties. This is when a few families began to come and to settle here, like our's and several others.

My family came to Marsa Matruh in 1920. We are from Sharqiya and, a long time ago, from Arabia and from Iraq. Of course, I do not forget that I am Sharqawi. My grandfather came with the *haras al-hudud* ["border guard"]. He came on a special mission to construct houses and buildings for the government. He came alone but, later on, brought his family and stayed on permanently.

They liked it, both the place and the people. The people were in their natural state. They had honor and dignity. My family also had these qualities, praise Allah; and they adapted and blended in with the natives. They are all buried here in Matruh, my father and my grandfather.

My father's brother was the first Shari'a 'alim ["learned person"] to come here from the Nile Valley. Before that, the Sanusiya [a religious reform movement based in Libya] was here. He used to teach people the proper Islamic ways and teachings. He spread the religious consciousness. My brother was the first officer in the Egyptian armed forces from Matruh, from all the desert region. He entered the military academy in 1960. And he died, a martyr, in the war in Yemen. His martyrdom was a source of pride to the whole region. Everybody here felt this was their achievement, that he was their son. We became sons of the desert.

This man praised the contributions of the early migrants to development in the northwest coast. "They were teachers and 'ulama' and engineers who made plans." The Bedouin, he said, had "strong Islam" before the Nile Valley migrants came, but "they used to blend Islam with their traditions. Some of these traditions were correct and agreed with Islam, but others

needed purification." The Nile Valley '*ulama'* provided "purification and guidance." Generally, he characterized the Bedouin as having honor but being backward. He stated that the majority of people in the Nile Valley are illiterate but that many from that part of Egypt also embody "progress." The Bedouin, he said, follow the "progress made by the people of the Nile Valley. And, today, we find among them women engineers and doctors, teachers, and employees. At the same time, they hold on to their traditions." He concluded by saying,

The Egyptian is different from the Arab here. The Egyptian has evolved. He used to have customs like the Bedouin, but a long time ago. He found that some of these customs are not in accord with the modern age. These are small differences between the Egyptians and the Arabs.

To come to the truth, we have the same religion, the same language. What is shameful for the Arab is also shameful for the Egyptian. The land is one. We were here during the Second World War. And our fate was the same as that of the Arabs. People from the Nile Valley died here on this land right next to the Arabs, both killed by the same German or English bombs. They died here together. And they faced the process of forced migration, also together, to various places—to Alexandria, to Bahaira. And they returned to Matruh, also together.

Solidarity tempered by some ambiguity characterizes most relations between the old migrants and the Bedouin or, at least, what they say about each other. They say they go to each other's funerals. Senior men from among the old migrants make visitations to the homes of senior men from among the Bedouin at the times of Muslim feasts. Some of the migrants' daughters have married Bedouin men; but one migrant said, "There is still some difficulty for Nile Valley men to marry women from among the Arabs." The old migrants have been in the community for about three generations, and most are well-educated and hold responsible positions in public service and/or good jobs in the private sector. Many of them own property in Marsa Matruh. Well established in the community for a long time, they are also a minority. Not surprisingly, they stress common bonds that link them to the majority Bedouin within the regional society. As a young man from among the old migrants said, "The urban Bedouin are exactly like us. We all wake up at the same time. Our lifestyles are the same. Of course, Bedouin in the desert are different."

The old migrants and the Bedouin speak of Sons of the Nile Valley coming in waves since the 1960s. The first large wave poured into the region forty or so years ago as the state introduced the local government system, set

up schools and health care facilities, and introduced development programs and projects. These migrants were government employees and came from urban backgrounds in the Nile Valley. They are similar in status to the old migrants and generally blend in with them in Marsa Matruh. People whose parents migrated and settled in the 1960s also express a strong identity with the region. As one man said, "I was five years old when my father brought us here in the sixties. My children were born in Matruh and have been raised here. I am from Matruh. I am not from somewhere else."

A second wave of migrants arrived in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These people came from rural areas or the urban lower class and were especially attracted to the northwest coast because of trade, mainly smuggling, with Libya. The Bedouin usually shoulder all the blame for this smuggling, but Sons of the Nile Valley also participated. The strict closure of the border with Libya in the mid-1970s ended most smuggling activities, and many small-scale traders from the Nile Valley left the area. However, some stayed on to engage in legal trade and other services.

A third wave of migrants gathered momentum in the 1970s. This wave came from Upper Egypt. According to one of the old migrants, "The Upper Egyptians who came were merchants and had money. Others of them worked here and made money. They have a lot of endurance." Prominent among the Upper Egyptians in Matruh are the Juhaina. They are an Arab people with origins in the Hijaz region of western Arabia and a long history of settlement in the Upper Egyptian governorate of Suhaj (Murray 1935:298–299). The Juhaina are especially strong as merchants and traders in Marsa Matruh, but some of the younger generation raised in the town now work as professionals. Other migrants from different communities in Upper Egypt predominate in the construction sector of the regional economy.

Migrants from Upper Egypt have long established *jama'iat*, "associations," in communities where they have settled in other parts of Egypt. Many of these were first set up to provide assistance for the transport of the dead for burial in the cemeteries of their home communities. The associations also provide other kinds of support, including the maintenance of social ties among the migrants and informal networks important for job recruitment and the pooling of financial resources and information relevant to investment activities. Associations of this type have been established by Upper Egyptian migrants in Marsa Matruh. Membership is based on community of origin, and members say they pay fees and make contributions to provide support for any of their people in need. The associations have boards of directors and leaders who speak on behalf of their members and, more informally, guide newcomers in finding jobs and settling in. Not surprisingly, the existence of the associations fosters the continuation of strong

identity with the home community. Simultaneously, the associations provide members with special support in the host community, a phenomenon sometimes resented by other migrants without similar support networks.

The old migrants and the Bedouin say the latest wave of migrants began to arrive in the mid-1980s. These people mainly hail from villages and towns in the Lower Egyptian governorates of Kafr ash-Shaikh and Bahaira. The desert development boom underway in other parts of Egypt began to mushroom in the northwest coast around 1985. The reopening of the border with Libya at the end of the 1980s also contributed to a commercial boom in Marsa Matruh, including another round of illegal or semi-illegal trade. Hope of finding a job or work as a small-scale trader has motivated many of these rather poor migrants to come. Many of them work as casual laborers and live in makeshift housing in slums that have recently sprung up in parts of Marsa Matruh.

The old migrants are sometimes critical of their fellow Sons of the Nile Valley. Their harshest criticism is reserved for the most recent migrants. The following statement by a man whose ancestors settled in Marsa Matruh seventy-five years ago, around 1920, summarizes important aspects of the history of migration and shows how he views different groups of migrants:

In the past, some very rich people came from Cairo and Alexandria and bought land to build houses for use in the summer, like in the film of Laila Murad [*"Shatt al-Gharam"*, a famous Egyptian movie of the 1950s]. Then, there were migrants who came during the time of the trade with Libya, before the border was closed in the seventies.

Many Upper Egyptians have come here. They work in construction, and many are traders. They are here in big numbers and they form big *'ailat'*; they have to be taken seriously, a group to contend with. They are the most useful of the more recent migrants. They own shops. Those who came early made quite a bit of money. We say the Upper Egyptian works and saves. Many of the Upper Egyptians are from Juhaina. That is both a tribe and a village. Most of the Juhaina are merchants; maybe that is why they are more influential than other Upper Egyptians here.

The Upper Egyptians brought many of their relatives to settle here. They are all in contact with each other and they support each other and have their own leaders who help solve conflicts between themselves and between them and other people. Here in Matruh social control is more important than legal control, or the police. However, the government employee from Alexandria comes on his own and does not have all of that kind of support.

The migrants who came more recently, in the eighties and nineties, are more like parasites; they just consume. They work in the lowest kinds of

jobs. They drive the *carrettas*, work in restaurants and cafes, sweep the streets—unskilled jobs, nonspecialized work. They mostly come from Kafr ash-Shaikh and Bahaira. They all live in *masakin 'ashwa'iya* [“random housing;” “shanties”]. Some work as third-class clerks. Some are teachers; but they come here as a stepping stone to getting a job teaching in another Arab country. Most of the new teachers are not well qualified. The migrants since '85 or '86 don't have any class. All the bad workers who could not find jobs in Alexandria or other places came here to Matruh.

A university-educated Bedouin from the Awlad 'Ali listened to these comments about the more recent migrants. He disagreed with his friend and former schoolmate from the old migrants, and said,

Some of the people who came recently take on jobs that no one else wants to do, like sweeping the street. That is important. Also, we have a cafe. Three of the workers come from Kafr ash-Shaikh, one from Minya, and two from Bani Suif. Two are Copts and the others Muslims. No problem. Conflicts break out between people, but they get solved.

The recent migrants also include engineers and doctors. I know people who came recently and set up a contracting firm. They bring development and provide employment opportunities. The Bedouin and the old migrants here cannot develop the desert all by ourselves. We need other people, as well. Take 'Amriya. It used to be desert. Now, it is all developed; but many people had to work together for that to happen. Also, we who are Bedouin and got educated can never forget our first teachers. They all came from the Nile Valley.

Sons of the Nile Valley in the northwest coast obviously have their internal differences. Class, settlement history, and community of origin are strong dividers. Conflicts and tensions exist among the migrant settlers, among the Bedouin, and between the migrant settlers and the Bedouin (Sherbiny, Cole, and Girgis 1992:21–27). Conflicts among settlers revolve around problems between workers and employers, while those among Bedouin especially result from land sales that bring large amounts of money to a few and little or nothing to others. These conflicts have an obvious class dimension. However, conflicts between settlers and Bedouin suggest problems along a sociocultural cleavage. For example, a Bedouin worker in Marsa Matruh said,

The migrants do not respect the traditions of the area they have moved into. They think they are better than us. They wear unsuitable clothes and behave

irresponsibly. They cause problems and teach the local people bad habits. Also, they commit many robberies when they cannot find work (quoted in *ibid*:25).

By contrast, a settler in Marsa Matruh said, "We ask to be represented in the local council but that angers the Bedouin." Another settler said, "The [Bedouin] are biased in their own favor and do not consider us part of the community." Yet a third settler said, "Migrants came and developed the city, [then] the Bedouin came. They are unfriendly and don't care about anything except their own interests, especially in making money. The Bedouin kills his brother for money" (quoted in *ibid*:25).

We heard complaints and racist slurs about each other from both of the two main components of the people of Matruh. We also heard many unsolicited comments which reflect a strong sense of community. On several occasions, younger Bedouin men recalled the old process of *iktitab*, whereby outsiders and especially people from the Nile Valley were "adopted" or "written" into their clans and tribes (see Mohsen 1975:11). They mentioned this as a sign of their openness and liberal attitudes toward people of other backgrounds and origins. Meanwhile, some Bedouin mentioned great fear of the black *hajana*, "camel corps," in the past; but they greet and interact with the grandsons of those *hajana* as if they were cousins—all part of the same people.

Egypt is widely considered to be one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in the Arab world. However, a Son of the Nile Valley in Marsa Matruh said,

Egypt has more diversity than any other country. There are many different peoples in Egypt. If you look around, you will find that the people from Alexandria don't like the Upper Egyptians. In Cairo, people don't like those who live in slums. The people from Port Sa'id don't like people who are not from Port Sa'id. But all these different peoples say "We are Egyptians" in times of crisis. We all fought in the wars. Matruh has martyrs from all the different wars.

Although framed within the context of Egypt as a whole, this man's statement was really about the sociocultural diversity that characterizes the northwest coast: different groups and competing interests but a strong capacity to stand together when necessary. Association with and loyalty to the people of one's ancestral group, however defined, is strong in the northwest coast. The Awlad 'Ali are extremely proud of their ancestry. The *murabtin* express pride in their own origins and exert themselves to achieve

good positions in the changing society and economy. To be a Son of the Nile Valley is also a source of great pride to those who share that identity.

Differences can be, and are, exploited for political purposes. Yet an old Bedouin without formal schooling recognized Mussolini's nefarious attempt to sow discord between the Sa'ada and the *murabtin*. Denial of significant differences between the various components of the people of Matruh would be a serious distortion of reality as perceived by the local people and by ourselves. Assertion of rigid and unchanging boundaries between the different components also distorts the social scene as lived by people in the steppe and others in towns—be they from the desert or the sown.

CHAPTER 3

The Bedouin and Outside Forces, 1798 to the 1940s

Modern scholarly tradition asserts that a new historical era began in Egypt with the 1798 French invasion and subsequent occupation of the country until 1801. Egypt, said to have been asleep for a long time, woke up. Then, Muhammad 'Ali arrived on the scene and defeated the past in the form of the Mamluks. A new age defined as modern began to be ushered in. This version of history, of course, distorts reality through oversimplification and the reification of one event and one ruler as the sole agents of change.

The reader is reminded that the Awlad 'Ali also arrived on the scene in Egypt about this time, in fact a bit earlier. No one has ever accused or credited them with instigating modernization in the country; nonetheless, their arrival back into Egypt, their fighting against the French invaders, and their war against the Hanadi certainly show that the country was neither asleep nor unchanging when the French arrived—not even among the Bedouin way out in a remote desert. Societies collapse, are destroyed by others, and cease to reproduce themselves; but they do not go to sleep. Change was taking place in Egypt, including its deserts, before the French and before Muhammad 'Ali.

Still, the period associated with the French and with Muhammad 'Ali witnessed the beginning of a major shift in the orientation and organization of Egypt's political economy. Once again, as in the millennium of Greco-Roman-Byzantine rule, Egypt was pulled into a Eurocentric system of power, control, and economic exploitation. The modern system has probably never reached the efficient and effective level of exploitation achieved for a couple of centuries by the ancient Romans, but outside control of the country has been equally resented by ancient and modern Egyptians. In both ages, some collaborated with the outsiders and became integrated socially and culturally into the new system. However, the steadfastness of the ancients can be inferred, for example, from a statement by Ammianus Marcellinus who, in the fourth century C.E., wrote that the Egyptians are

"quarrelsome and most persistent in getting their own way" (quoted in Bowman 1986:16).

The resistance of Nile Valley Egyptians to modern hegemonic or imperial control from the outside is well known and took many forms—some active and others passive. The Egyptian nationalist movement, including a revolt led by 'Urabi in 1882 and the 1919 Revolution when urban and rural demonstrators massively rebelled against British rule, is a major example of their resistance. The desert pastoralists also resisted. The reader will recall their standing as a guard against foreign intruders before Alexander the Great founded his city on a strip of desert outside the Nile Valley. More than 2,100 years later, the Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin fought against the French intruders at battles near Alexandria and at a major confrontation near the pyramids, where "Bedouin horsemen formed the left wing of the Mameluke army" (Murray 1935:30).

One can argue, with justification, that the desert Bedouin did not actively participate in the later Egyptian nationalist movement against the British. They were sympathetic to the movement, but seem to have viewed it as a distant struggle of Nile Valley people within their part of Egypt. The Bedouin couched their resistance more in Muslim and Arab terms of identity than in those of Egyptian nationalism. However, Bedouin in the northwest coast fought against foreign intrusion during the First World War and then sustained twenty years or more of a low-level insurgency against the British in their part of the country. They were steadfast in their rejection of foreign hegemony. A part of their resistance was a projection of fear into the minds of Europeans. Long before their active rebellion during the First World War, the Bedouin had managed to scare most Europeans away from their territories. An example of this fear is provided by Butler, with reference to the northwest coast:

[T]he people are fanatics of the lowest type. The wandering Arab keeps out the wandering scholar . . . [This exclusion is] as much due to the rule of the Turk as to the fanaticism of the Beduin: but the two form a combination enough to make travel almost impossible (Butler 1978 [1902]:12–13).

Because of the centrality of the shift in orientation of Egypt's political economy brought about by European economic and political colonialism, it is not surprising that discourse about change, even among people in a remote region like the northwest coast, should be tinged with references to foreign rulers and what they did and how they administered. Elderly men in the region also call attention to changes introduced at the time of Muhammad 'Ali that have had long term impacts on Bedouin in the wider context of

Egyptian society. They are remarkably silent about the Sanusiya religious movement which, nonetheless, was very important in the Western Desert from the 1860s or so until the end of the First World War. They praise Abbas Hilmi II, Khedive of Egypt from 1892 to 1914, for first introducing development into the northwest coast at the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, the Awlad 'Ali and other tribespeople directly experienced the First and Second World Wars, and the fighting that took place there remains in their consciousness.

Development experts all too often ignore the past or wrongly assume that "traditional" societies were unchanging before the introduction of innovations specifically defined as part of the development process. The first development recognized by most experts concerned with the northwest coast are changes introduced since about 1960. Like the French invasion and Muhammad 'Ali's ascent to power, changes from the 1960s marked a significant shift from the past in Matruh. However, to assume that the region's people were bound by tradition and, thus, unchanging before 1960 is to miss a rich and complex history.

This history forms a part of Arab cultural heritage and, on that basis alone, is worthy of being recorded. However, this history also has salience today, since recent changes do not start with an empty slate but build on a strong local experience of dramatic changes and sustained survival in the face of complex political forces emanating from outside this part of desert Egypt. This chapter sketches the transformation from Muhammad Ali's time through the end of the Second World War and the return of the people of Matruh to a devastated homeland.

Muhammad 'Ali and State-Tribe Relations

Four major changes with long-term sociopolitical impacts were introduced by the Ottoman government of Egypt headed by Muhammad 'Ali. The state appointed officials from among the Bedouin to represent different tribal segments to the state and vice-versa. The state exempted the Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin from military and other national service. The state granted them tax-free usufruct rights to land in the steppe, but without the possibility of private or corporate ownership of the land. Lastly, the state recognized the Awlad 'Ali '*urf* as the legal system in the northwest coast for dealing with internal disputes and crimes perpetrated by Bedouin against each other.

The legitimacy of Islamic states was always recognized, in principle, by pastoralists throughout the Arab world. However, the centers of effective state power and authority were usually remote from the arid range lands

where most Bedouin operated. As a result, Arab pastoralists provided most of their own defense, ordered access to water and land resources, and guarded wealth in the form of livestock and other moveable capital. They managed their affairs in the desert through a strongly decentralized sociopolitical system. Whereas outsiders enculturated in state societies see desert tribes as chiefdoms, the Bedouin see their tribes as composites of lineages. The outsider today looks for the tribal chief and finds an *amir al-qabila*, "tribal prince," in Saudi Arabia and a Bedouin shaikh and a shaikh of shaikhs in Egypt. These positions emanate from the state.

Evans-Pritchard (1949:59) records that men with wealth, prestige, and influence were respected by "ordinary" Bedouin in eastern Libya. However, "it is . . . necessary to emphasize . . . that [the shaikh's] social position is unformalized and that he must in no sense be regarded as a ruler or administrator." He also characterizes the Awlad 'Ali in comparison to eastern Libyan tribes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as "[t]he most broken up tribe of all, the tribe in which the sections were most intermixed, and the tribe which displayed the minimum of political cohesion" (*ibid*:72).

Awlad 'Ali told us of great military leaders in the past—for example, one Abu Hindi. These men led kinsmen and allies into battle; but they had no formal mechanisms of coercion to force people to fight or to punish deserters. The only indigenous, socially marked position of leadership among the Awlad 'Ali was, and is, that of the *'aqila*, as demonstrated in detail by Obermeyer (1968:152–166; 179–182; 250–255) and on whose writings we draw heavily in this section. This position is associated with the minimal lineage (*bait*).

Leadership also exists at the level of households and *jumla*, and great respect for age results in generalized authority being vested in seniors. The *rajul khair*, "good man," is a socially marked status that an individual may achieve and that may involve *de facto* leadership of numerous followers. Also existing is the *rajul salih*, "pious man," a status tinged with local spiritual belief and practice. However, the Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin of the northwest coast have no socially marked positions of leadership at the level of clans or tribes.

The *'aqila* was, and is, elected or, more commonly, chosen on the basis of consensus by adult males in the minimal lineage. Since he is supposed to have wisdom, the *'aqila* is usually a senior. He is responsible for collecting blood-wealth from his lineage mates and has to make up any deficit from his own resources. He also incurs heavy hospitality expenditures. Therefore, the *'aqila* is usually from a wealthy family. His specific duties are set forth in written *rawabit*, "bonds;" "charters," that also specify the constituency of the lineage and the rights and obligations of its members. Details vary from

lineage to lineage, but the '*aqila*' is always charged with the regulation of conflict between members of his own group and between them and men from other kindreds. He speaks on behalf of his kinsmen and represents them to others.

Once selected, he usually serves for life or until senility prohibits him from performing his duties. However, his loyalty must be to his own people, as indicated by a case in which an '*aqila*' was removed from the position and expelled from his lineage and the tribe because he "informed Egyptian officials that his fellow tribesmen were storing guns and ammunition beyond the quantity permitted by national security laws" (*ibid*:159).

Evans-Pritchard draws on the 1827 account of J.R. Pacho, who had visited the northwest coast, to indicate that Muhammad 'Ali first broke the Awlad 'Ali tribes and then appointed a few of their members to titled positions. These were the men bestowed with "robes of honor." They were laughed at by most of the Awlad 'Ali, according to Pacho (Evans-Pritchard 1949:60). Nonetheless, these men occupied political roles in "an officially created political structure" designed by Muhammad 'Ali to hold the Bedouin "in check." They carried, and continue to carry, the title of '*umda*', a position usually associated with the headman, or "mayor," of a Nile Valley village. However, this position "had [not] previously existed in the Bedouin authority system." Much later on, around 1910, the British added another political role, that of shaikh. He was, and is, "a kind of vice-'*umda*" (Obermeyer 1968:14–15).

Muhammad 'Ali's '*umdas* among the Awlad 'Ali were supposed to assist the state in regional administration, the maintenance of law and order in the desert, and the guarding of Egypt's western border. They were probably not very effective, as the following statement from an elderly Awlad 'Ali senior suggests:

No border ever existed between us and Libya until the Italians created it as a border between themselves and the English. That was at the time of the First World War.

Our area was a part of the Ottoman *dawla* ["state"]. One could move from Morocco in the west to here, and nobody would stop him. Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, who came from Turkey, was the *wali* ["governor"]. He found that Turkey had made Egypt weak. And he made a revolution against Turkey and told the Egyptians we are independent.

But the rule was weak here before Muhammad 'Ali Pasha. And Muhammad 'Ali Pasha also did not send a *wali* or any other important representative to this area. No one came to us until Abbas [Hilmi II at the beginning of the twentieth century].

State policies under Muhammad 'Ali and his nineteenth century successors did not specifically target the Awlad 'Ali or the northwest coast but encompassed Bedouin throughout the country. The majority of Egypt's Bedouin lived on the edges of the Nile Valley, and many were scattered among the fellahin. A few men from among these Bedouin were appointed as district officials in the countryside. Most of these new officials established residences in towns, and some became large-scale landowners through state patronage in the form of grants to newly reclaimed agricultural land in the Nile Valley and the Faiyum. Meanwhile, most of their tribal relatives floundered as poor shepherds and transporters of agricultural crops or were "lost" among the fellahin (see Baer 1969:3-16).

Awlad 'Ali '*umdas* in the arid steppe of the northwest coast never approximated the wealth of their more fortunate cohorts in the Nile Valley; but their holding of an official position differentiated them from their kinreds. The position of '*umda*' and that of the shaikh added by the British became hereditary and "are considered 'the property' of the wealthiest lineages" (Obermeyer 1968:276). Until the 1960s brought opportunities for amassing wealth through legal and illegal trade, the '*umdas*' and shaikhs tended to be the richest individuals among the Bedouin of the northwest coast. Some, compared to most of their fellow tribespeople, are still very rich.

Only a few '*umdas*' existed during the nineteenth century, but they and the shaikhs increased in number as the role of the state in the desert expanded under the British. Kennett (1968 [1925]:18-19) asserts that the state used the "existing machinery" of the tribal system to maintain law and order in the desert. '*Umdas*' and shaikhs were employed by the government and were responsible for arresting alleged criminals and bringing them to jail. However, the "existing machinery" of Kennett's time at the beginning of the twentieth century had been established by the state, and not the tribe, long before the British arrived on the scene.

Some of these men are highly respected, but we also heard Bedouin make disparaging comments about them. They are the men who know how to speak with the authorities. Ideally, they are supposed to speak for the Bedouin they represent. Some do, but Mohsen reports the following two comments by Awlad 'Ali about their state appointed leaders:

"[The '*umda* of our *bait*] is the government man, not ours . . . He would sell us all if this pleases his masters in the government" (1975:79).

"The '*omda* or *sheikh* is both a blessing and curse to his tribe. He can bring benefits to his tribe, but at the same time he has to report his own

people if one of them breaks the city laws . . . His position is like that of a double-edged razor" (*ibid*:81).

The appointment of '*umdas*' and shaikhs among the Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin of the northwest coast was no catastrophe for their tribal organization. The old decentralized segmentary system still operates, but alongside and sometimes intertwined with the state bureaucracy and political system and with the market. However, the tradition of the Awlad 'Ali as warriors was obliterated by the state. As already noted, elderly seniors recall that their fathers and grandfathers told them of their service in military forces organized by Muhammad 'Ali. According to one senior,

Muhammad 'Ali Pasha used to ask the help of the tribes when there was war. If a man had three sons, they would take one. If he had four, they would take two; and if five, two. These conscripts were considered volunteers. Of course, we did not work on the canals. That work was for the fellahin and for people from Upper Egypt. We were for war only.

However, "when Muhammad 'Ali reorganized his army and conscripted the *fellahin*," the state exempted the Awlad 'Ali and most other desert Bedouin from military service (Murray 1935:31). This exemption was partly in recognition of their previous military service. On the surface, the exemption would appear to have been a good thing, especially as it extended to the onerous corvée labor required for maintenance work on canals, roads, and other infrastructure. However, an elderly senior from the Kamailat clan of the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar, told us the following:

Muhammad 'Ali tricked the Awlad 'Ali by offering to keep them out of the army. One of the leaders at that time accepted. But he was old and illiterate and did not know the ways of the government. Another man from the Awlad 'Ali was young and had been to Istanbul and had studied there. He cautioned them against accepting Muhammad 'Ali's offer. He said that they should try to get into the army and to get involved in the government. The matter was put to a vote, and everybody endorsed the recommendation of the old leader. So, the Awlad 'Ali were kept out of the army and did not get involved in the government of Egypt.

Exemption from military service fostered marginalization of the Bedouin from Egypt's modernizing political economy. Since its inception in the nineteenth century, the modern Egyptian army and other military forces have

provided a major means of upward social mobility. The military has occupied a position at or near the center of political power and has played a major role in the national economy. Some other Arab countries, notably Jordan and Saudi Arabia, have especially recruited Bedouin into their military forces, which has enhanced their political influence and also provided them with economic and other benefits. In Egypt, however, the Bedouin were excluded from the military until a new conscription law in 1947 ended their exemption. Their actual recruitment into the national forces did not become regularized until after the 1952 Revolution. Awlad 'Ali say that President Gamal Abdel-Nasser brought them back into the army.

Exemption from military service fueled resentment against the Bedouin on the part of Nile Valley people, who felt that this special treatment was not deserved. Moreover, their exempt status encouraged some from the Nile Valley, who wished to escape military service, to hide from recruiters by seeking refuge in the desert, where they were sometimes written into the tribes through the process of *iktitab* (Mohsen 1975:11). Officials and other Nile Valley people blamed the Bedouin for harboring draft dodgers and deserters.

Concerning land, the Awlad 'Ali were granted usufruct rights in the northwest coast early in the nineteenth century. The state allowed them to distribute the land among themselves as they wished, but in accord with the Jumi'at and other people already there. This sanction cancelled any claims other tribes such as the Hanadi or the Bani 'Una might make to rights in the region and can also be interpreted as an assertion by Muhammad 'Ali that these territories fell within his domain of formal authority. Indeed, the land was state property.

Legislation in the middle of the nineteenth century under a descendant of Muhammad 'Ali strengthened the Egyptian state's claim to ownership of undemarcated desert land. Meanwhile, the ownership of agricultural land in the Nile Valley was rapidly privatized from the 1850s, so that by "the twentieth century all agricultural land in Egypt was the full private property of its owners (except, of course, *waqf* land)" (Baer 1969:70). This assertion does not apply to desert Egypt, where agriculture was also practiced.

The cultivation of barley has an ancient history in the northwest coast. Along with livestock-raising, its cultivation was, and is, a major activity of the Awlad 'Ali, the Jumi'at, and other Bedouin. Dependent on meager and highly variable rainfall, this agriculture obviously requires different land use patterns from the irrigated agriculture of the Nile Valley. Private ownership of fixed parcels of land would not have been appropriate for the northwest coast, where the flexibility nomadism provided was a positive feature of the old land use pattern. However, nineteenth century land laws provided the

Bedouin with no formal or legal rights to the land they used. The state allowed, and allows, the Bedouin to use the land at its pleasure.

Without ownership of the land, they were, and are, exempt from land taxes. No one would complain about an exemption from taxes. However, this exemption marked them as different from Nile Valley Egyptians, who paid land taxes but also received Nile water for free and benefited from the state's vast irrigation network and land reclamation projects. The burden of taxes can be onerous, but their payment can, and has, provided people with the basis for a say in state political systems.

In 1832, according to Mohsen (1970:25–26), "Awlad 'Ali were granted a form of legal . . . autonomy whereby the government acknowledged the tribal legal and judicial system as the means to settle disputes between the members of the tribe." Obermeyer (1968:195–196) reports a claim that the state "abolished" Awlad 'Ali customary law in 1933 but then accepted it again, "for [the state was] unable to effectively manage group and tribal political relations." Mohsen (1975:15) records that in 1954, "the jurisdiction of the State's legal system was extended to the area, resulting, sometimes, in dual judicial processes."

The Awlad 'Ali are proud of their '*urf*' and praise it as highly effective in settling disputes rapidly. In Chapter 8 we show that some speak of how the '*urf*' can be adapted to deal with new issues and problems that have emerged as a result of recent change. However, the state's toleration of one set of laws among Bedouin in the desert and its enactment of formal codes to be applied among people in the rest of the country obviously differentiated the Bedouin from the majority of Egyptians. Moreover, the state's acknowledgement of '*urf*' was not motivated by a concern to protect the Bedouin's indigenous legal system but reflects the state's relative neglect of the desert compared to the Nile Valley. The state "showed no interest in the area occupied by the Awlad 'Ali . . . [and] the tribal population did not present any particular security problems to attract [its] attention" (*ibid*:13).

Our analysis asserts that actions taken by the state had the effect, largely unintended, of enhancing inequality among the tribespeople and of marginalizing them from the developing political economy centered in the Nile Valley. Nonetheless, statements by Awlad 'Ali about change in the nineteenth century suggest their recognition today of the legitimacy of the Egyptian state, especially as personified by Muhammad 'Ali. Their statements also suggest a dislike of the Turks and indicate their preference for the Arab identity. For example, an elderly senior said that his father, who "learned how to read when he was about ten years old," had told him that Muhammad 'Ali had an Arab background from the Masamir tribe, who are his own matrilateral relatives. According to this senior,

The great grandfather of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha came from as-Saqia al-Hamra in the Maghrib. From the Masamir, a noble tribe. He had a son. The Ottomans did not let him learn Arabic. They used to take all these gifted people [from among the Arabs] and teach them Turkish so that they would become Turks.

Muhammad 'Ali Pasha's father or grandfather became the *wali* in Albania. I don't remember which. I did not read this in a book. Anyway, when the Turks brought Muhammad 'Ali here to Egypt as the *wali*, he knew only a very little bit of Arabic. The Ottomans always wanted the *wali* of Egypt to be a Turk. But Muhammad 'Ali Pasha made Egypt prosper.

The Sanusiya

Although Awlad 'Ali did not speak much about it, the founding of the Sanusiya movement and its establishment in eastern Libya in the nineteenth century brought significant change to desert communities, including those of the northwest coast and the Western Desert oases. This movement, described in detail by Evans-Pritchard (1949) and recently reinterpreted by political scientist Ali Abdullatif Ahmida (1994), can be seen, among other things, as an early and indigenous form of desert development which fostered the establishment of new communities, new desert agriculture, and the spread of literacy. The Sanusiya was also involved in the creation of a far-flung trade network which extended throughout much of the central and southern reaches of the Great Sahara; and its leaders played important roles in dispute settlement in the desert communities associated with it.

Egyptian explorer Ahmad Hassanein Bey traveled extensively in the Western Desert in 1921 and 1923, rediscovered two "lost" oases in Egypt's extreme southwest, and also noted that "[a]ny story of the Libyan Desert would not be complete without some consideration of the Senussis, the most important influence in the region" (Hassanein Bey 1925:42).

The movement began as a Sufi order (*tariqa*) founded about 1833 in the Hijaz by Sayid Muhammad bin 'Ali Al Sanusi. Born in Algeria in 1787, Al Sanusi studied in North Africa and, as a young man, made the holy pilgrimage to Makka. He remained in the Hijaz for about six years and continued his studies under various shaikhs. After a brief return to his homeland, he went back to the Hijaz and founded the new order, which rapidly began to spread among Arabian Bedouin in the Hijaz.

The order strongly insisted on conformity to the basic principles of Islam as revealed in the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith and followed the Maliki *madhab*, "school of law," of Sunni Islam. It did not engage in ecstatic prac-

tices common among many other Sufi orders and shared many similarities with the Wahhabiya reform movement, founded in the eighteenth century in Najd by Shaikh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Indeed, the Sanusiya was the only Sufi order tolerated in the Hijaz by the Wahhabiya, who also found nothing in its teachings or practices that was *bid'a*, "innovation;" "heresy" (Evans-Pritchard 1949:1–13).

The Sanusiya and the Wahhabiya both forbade the drinking of alcohol, dancing, singing, and the playing of music. Unlike the Wahhabiya, the Sanusiya generally showed tolerance of "saint's" tombs. Also, the Sanusiya never formed an alliance with a "temporal" leader as Ibn 'Abd Wahhab had done with Muhammad ibn Sa'ud, the amir of Diri'ya. Among the Sanusiya, both "political" and "religious" leadership always remained within the Al Sanusi family. Both movements had "missionary" orientations that, in practice, focused on desert-dwelling peoples, among whom they sought to impart a more "correct" understanding of Islamic beliefs, morals, and practices.

Both movements also fostered the development of new communities dependent on agriculture in desert regions. Among the Wahhabiya, these settlements were known as *hujur*. Among the Sanusiya, new settlements expanded or developed around lodges (sg., *zawiya*) which they established. Although significant differences existed, both movements also had *Ikhwan*, "Brethren;" "Brotherhood," made up of those most actively engaged in the movements. Although popular among the Bedouin and others in small towns and villages, both movements were highly unpopular among the Sharifs, '*ulama'*, and Ottoman officials in Makka and Madina. The Wahhabiya *Ikhwan*, along with the Al Sa'ud, eventually defeated these people and threw them out of the Hijaz in the 1920s. Al Sanusi, however, was expelled from the Hijaz around 1841.

He made his way to Egypt and, according to Hassanein Bey, established his first lodge in Africa at Siwa. The explorer described a lodge, as follows:

A *zawia* is a building of three rooms, its size depending on the importance of the place in which it is situated. One room is a school-room in which the Bedouin children are taught by the *ikhwan*; the second serves as the guest-house in which travelers receive the usual three days' hospitality of Bedouin custom; in the third the *ikhwan* lives. The *zawia* is generally built near a well where travelers naturally stop. Attached to the *zawia* is often a bit of land which is cultivated by the *ikhwan*. The *ikhwan* are the active members of the brotherhood, who teach its principles and precepts. . . . [The *zawia* has] a *wakil* [who] is the personal representative or deputy of the head of the Senussis (Hassanein Bey 1925:43–44).

After passing through Siwa, Al Sanusi continued on into eastern Libya and, in 1843, set up headquarters at Zawiya al-Baida' near Darna in the Jabal Akhdar region. In 1856, he moved his headquarters to the largely uninhabited oasis of Jaghbub, just west of the Egyptian-Libyan border about 150 kilometers northwest of Siwa. At Jaghbub he founded a major center of learning which became the second most important Islamic university in Africa, after Al-Azhar University in Cairo. This new community in an ancient oasis attracted a large number of residents and also developed agriculture to supply its basic subsistence needs.

Eventually, 146 lodges were established by the Sanusiya. Thirty-one of these were located within Egypt's Western Desert—six in the New Valley oases, two at Bahriya, six in and around Siwa, and seventeen across the northwest coast from al-Akhsab at Sallum to Hawsh 'Isa in Bahaira (Evans-Pritchard 1949:24–25). However, the movement's "center" was in eastern Libya, where each lodge tended to be associated with a single tribe or major section of a tribe. The greatest number of lodges associated with a single tribe was the case of seventeen lodges among the Awlad 'Ali.

A few descendants of the Sanusi family maintain occasional contact with the northwest coast and can be seen from time to time in Marsa Matruh. However, the Sanusiya movement is now all but gone from the region except as a memory. The lodges were closed after the First World War and their leaders ordered away by the British-controlled government of Egypt. However, jurisdictional zones established by the Sanusiya were kept intact after the war and, according to Mohsen (1975:74), "police stations replaced the religious centers."

Discussion with a man from the Siraihat clan in an area west of Marsa Matruh included a reference to boundaries between different groups and this led to his evaluation of the Sanusiya in the northwest coast. He claims that although the borders are known, disagreements continue to exist. According to him,

The Sanusiya did not really arbitrate disagreements on borders between tribes. When there was a disagreement on the land, they moved in and took it. People used to fear the Sanusiya. They used to say that they have the power to invoke (Allah and the supernatural) against people and maybe even cause people to die that way. People were afraid they would kill them.

People back then did not really know Allah; but they knew individuals who moved among them and they feared them. So, they did not want to anger or disobey these people. The Sanusiya did not take the lands of people by force; the people voluntarily gave their lands to the Sanusiya. So, people

did not like to go to them to arbitrate land disputes, because they took people's property by using this (supernatural) power.

This evaluation of the Sanusiya is harsh. Others have been more generous. Kennett, for example, writes that,

In the Western Desert in the pre-war days the Senussi . . . Zawias, although afterwards denounced as hot-beds of dissension and intrigue, did really good work. The rising generation was taken seriously in hand, and classes in reading, writing, and Koran were held for the youngsters, not only at the zawias, but also out in the desert. A peripatetic teacher would wander forth, stay as a guest for a month in one tribal encampment, and conduct intensive lessons for all that desired instruction. He would then be given food and water for himself and his horse or camel sufficient to last him as far as the next encampment, where he would carry on the same procedure as before (1968 [1925]:146–147).

In the absence of any government schools in the desert, this was almost the only way the Awlad 'Ali and others in the northwest coast learned to read and write. Significantly, several Awlad 'Ali mentioned to us that literacy among men, generally, in the past was greater than it is today. Mohsen (1975:74) also calls attention to the teaching role of the lodges and further indicates that they provided food and clothing to people, extended refuge to those who needed protection, and helped in the mediation and settlement of disputes between tribal segments.

Early Twentieth-Century Development

We asked elderly seniors from the Awlad 'Ali when development had first started in the northwest coast. One replied that,

Abbas brought the railroad. He was the one who opened up the desert. Muhammad 'Ali used to just collect soldiers from the desert. This interest in the desert continued, and the English said, "You people in the desert, we will give you a separate *wilaya* ["province"] which will start in 'Amriya and go to the Libyan border. This will be a *wilaya* separate from Egypt." Our grandfathers said, "No. We are Egyptians. We are with Abbas Pasha."

This man's brother agreed with this statement and further elaborated, saying,

Yes, we like Abbas very much. His story is a long one. There are two Abbases. The one we like is the one the English banished. He was the first to open the desert. He made maps and brought schools and started the ‘amar [“building;” “development”]. He came to visit us and went to Siwa and visited the border. He also introduced police stations [*marakiz*]. They had Arab police and also the *hajana* from the Sudan. These Sudanese were dark and had scars on their cheeks.

These statements refer to Abbas Hilmi II, who became khedive in 1892. The British had occupied Egypt in 1882 during the reign of his father, Muhammad Tawfiq. Mainly educated in Austria, Abbas Hilmi II angered the British because he brought a number of Germans into his inner circle of advisors and confidants. Moreover, he was accused of being a voracious land speculator in both Egypt and Turkey and was criticized for a second marriage to an American-born Austro-Hungarian countess who often traveled around Egypt disguised as a man. The British had him deposed and sent him into exile a few months after the outbreak of the First World War (Rafaat 1994; Falls 1913:265–268).

Despite these controversies, Abbas Hilmi II played a major role in opening up Egypt’s desert regions to development. He personally financed exploration of the Western Desert, as well as the construction of the khedival railroad across the northwest coast. The railroad was planned, mapped, and surveyed by a German engineer, and all the materials and equipment used in its construction and for its operation were imported from Germany. However, the labor required for its construction was Egyptian. *Tarabil* workers toiled for low wages and conscripts worked as corvée labor. This railroad proceeded from a luxurious station near Alexandria’s western harbor. By 1908, the line had reached about 270 kilometers west of Alexandria and was approaching Marsa Matruh. The khedive intended for it to reach the port at Sallum. He apparently enjoyed traveling on the line and often kept a keen eye open for land that could be developed for agriculture (Falls 1913:204–217).

In 1906, Abbas Hilmi II became the first ruler of Egypt since Alexander the Great to visit the oasis of Siwa. He took the train to its terminus and then proceeded to Marsa Matruh by car. According to Falls, one of four Europeans who accompanied him, he set out from Marsa Matruh in a royal caravan with a vanguard of sixty-two Bedouin on camels and twenty soldiers mounted on horses. The main division of the caravan consisted of 288 camels, twenty-two horses, and twenty-eight mounted bodyguards under the command of a “dark-skinned Mameluke.” The caravan transported water brought all the way from Cairo, along with tents, silverware and fine china, and sumptuous provisions. Wine, spirits, and tobacco were available

for those who wished to indulge. The khedive sometimes rode horseback but usually traveled in a "kind of light dog-cart" pulled with difficulty across the desert terrain by horses.

After seven days, the potentate and his entourage reached Siwa where they were received by the Egyptian *ma'mur* [police chief], a local shaikh, and a few representatives of the Sanusiya. Drums, chanting, and the waving of palm fronds accompanied the caravan's entry; but the Siwan members of the Sanusiya *Ikhwan* greeted the khedive "in silence and with ceremonious coldness," an attitude Falls attributed to their memory of Siwa having been plundered in 1820 by troops sent by the khedive's ancestor, Muhammad 'Ali (ibid:262-275).

In Falls' estimation, Abbas Hilmi's interest in the desert was more that of a businessman than that of a national political leader concerned with the development of his country. Falls was engaged in archaeological excavations in the desert at Abu Minas, and the khedive and his Austro-Hungarian-American wife visited the site several times. However, the khedive seemed to wonder more about the monetary value of archaeology than about any scientific value it might have. The khedive also thought of his northwestern railroad as a business project that, when extended to Sallum, would earn profits by cutting the travel time from central Europe to Nile Valley Egypt by about two days. The main goal of the railroad was to attract European passengers and freight. Any side effects it might have on local regional development were of little concern. Business interests also motivated the khedive's trip to Siwa, as he was interested in the feasibility of reclaiming land there for commercial farming and wanted to see whether a branch railroad to Siwa could make money in the transport of the famous date production of the oasis (ibid:202; 217-219; 267-271).

Although motivated by business interests, the khedive's actions had a positive effect on the region's development. His visits to the area had great symbolic importance and affirmed that these territories are a part of Egypt. The railroad never brought much in the way of European passengers and freight, but it firmly linked the northwest coast to the rest of Egypt and stimulated the development of communities and markets along the line. Moreover, the khedive planned the development of modern Marsa Matruh, which he envisaged as a future regional administrative and commercial metropolis. Lack of a good source of drinking water was a problem at Marsa Matruh, and as a first step in the new town's development, he contracted a German drilling company to explore for water—and also for petroleum in the region. His own activities in the northwest coast were cut short by his deposal. According to Awlad 'Ali, the railroad was not completed until 1928. However, he laid down a basis for the region's future development.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, development in the northwest coast had khedival, business, and German connections. A Zionist connection also existed. According to Falls, “[a]n Egyptian land company attempted to found a large agricultural colony in Hamam [between 1905 and 1908], and settled Russian Jews there” (*ibid*:335–336); but the experiment failed. A Greek connection also existed and was especially prominent at Marsa Matruh, the literal translation of which is “remote anchorage.”

Around 1900 Marsa Matruh had a small fort garrisoned by the coast-guard and an important Sanusiya lodge. The Marsa Matruh census district had 398 people and 175 occupied houses in 1907. Males made up over 60 percent of the population, and almost a third of them could read and write. The majority were Muslims; but the census enumerated two Coptic Christians, one Orthodox and the other Protestant. The town also had one (non-Coptic) Protestant, twenty-three Roman Catholic and fifty-one Greek Orthodox Christians, and one Jew (Ministry of Finance 1909).

The non-Coptic Christians and the Jew were probably not Egyptians. Falls (1913:217) mentions Syrian and Armenian settlers in Marsa Matruh during this period and notes that many of these left for the Americas. According to the Awlad ‘Ali, the Greeks were predominant among the foreign settlers and were mainly traders who brought in goods by boat from Alexandria. The Greeks maintained a church and priests in the small town. Moreover, about a thousand Greeks came every year between May and October to engage in the sponge business.

Sponges from the northwest coast were valued for their beauty and fine quality. Greek traders from Turkish controlled islands organized squadrons of small boats with crews of eight to ten men. These traders used Marsa Matruh’s port as a basis for their operations, which involved sailing out to sea but not far from the coast where the crew dove to harvest the sponges from the sea. These traders operated under license from the Egyptian government and are said to have earned about twenty thousand pounds sterling per season (*ibid*:217–218). The traders and their crews added a lively dimension to the scene at Marsa Matruh in summer.

The First World War and the British

Political power in Egypt at this time was firmly in the hands of the British, especially Lord Cromer. At first, they showed no interest in opening up or developing the northwest coast. Indeed, Lord Cromer is said to have been strongly against the building of the railroad because he saw that it would open up the region. However, with the outbreak of the First World War, the

British were suddenly and directly involved in Matruh on a large scale. According to a renowned ‘aqila from the Awlad ‘Ali,

The English occupied Matruh in 1914 and continued to occupy the area until 1939. The rule here was English; and the governors here were English until 1939. The first Egyptian governor did not come until early in 1939, and he was a military officer. We were under military rule from 1914 to 1961. The system of administration changed in 1961, and the *hukum al-mahali* [“local government”] system was introduced.

Before and during the First World War, Egypt’s desert areas had been administered by various departments of the Egyptian government. The Egyptian Army garrisoned Sinai with British officers acting as governors. The Coast and Border Guards policed the Red Sea area of the Eastern Desert and the northwest coast, Siwa, and most of the rest of the Western Desert. The oases in the Western Desert, except for Siwa, came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. According to Jarvis, a long-time British governor of Sinai,

[T]he system was a failure—the Egyptian Army looked upon service in the desert as penal servitude, the Coastguards, being hard-boiled anti-contrabandists, saw the Arabs only as potential smugglers, whilst the Interior and other Ministries used the deserts as punishment stations to which they sent all their incorrigibly bad men (Jarvis 1936:2).

The British revised desert administration after the war; but before that happened, important battles were to be fought in Sinai, as well as in Matruh. The warfare that took place in Matruh was related to the Sanusiya movement, especially as it operated in Libya. Christian Italy had invaded Muslim Libya in 1911. The Turkish state then ceded Libya to Italy in 1912. The leader of the Sanusiya at that time, Sayid Ahmad Al Sharif Al Sanusi, responded by starting a war of resistance in Libya against the Italians. Bedouin especially joined the resistance and fought a guerilla-style war with great effectiveness. A few Turkish officers, who had remained in Libya despite the peace treaty, also provided support to the resistance movement.

Al Sanusi’s Bedouin fighters had gained the initiative against a demoralized Italian army by the outbreak of the First World War. However, the world war complicated the situation in Libya immensely. Italy joined Britain and France on one side, while Germany was allied with Turkey on the other. As allies of Italy, Britain and France thus became potential enemies of Al Sanusi’s forces. Germany and Turkey also conspired to lure the Al Sanusi led

resistance into conflict with Italy's allies so as to distract the allied forces, especially those of Britain, away from the main battlefields.

What had been a local, anti-colonial, guerilla-style resistance movement became a pawn in Great Power politics and warfare that had little to do with the local scene in the deserts of western Egypt and Libya. Eventually, Sayid Ahmad Al Sharif Al Sanusi and his mainly Bedouin fighters were at war not only with Italy but with the British and French Empires as well. The Italians never conquered them, but the wider war defeated this particular resistance movement (Evans-Pritchard 1949:104–133).

Battles took place in the western parts of the northwest coast between November 1915 and the end of March 1916 and resulted in the defeat of Al Sanusi's forces by the British (*ibid*:125–128). However, the British wrongly expected a reprisal and kept thirty thousand British troops in the area for months. According to Jarvis (1936:5), these troops were badly needed elsewhere but were kept in Matruh "facing a perfectly empty desert . . . [because we British] dearly love the bogy of a fanatical army of millions of desert Arabs yelling 'Allah!' and putting infidels to the sword."

The Awlad 'Ali and other people in Matruh remember these events and often talked to us about them. Awlad 'Ali say that they supported Al Sanusi's cause and that many fought with him and some died in the battles. This, of course, brought them into direct conflict with the British occupiers. They were not alone in defying the British, as numerous Nile Valley Egyptian troops in the British led army deserted to Al Sanusi's side. Awlad 'Ali say they supported Al Sanusi and his forces because they were Muslims and Arabs. At the same time, they express an awareness of the complicated political dimensions of the conflict which leads some to suggest that it was a hopeless cause. One elderly senior, very hard of hearing, lucidly recounted events that happened during the war and explained important aspects of the conflict, as follows:

I was five years old at the time of the battle of Wadi Majid [in the winter of 1916 west of Marsa Matruh]. That battle was part of the war which involved the Sanusiya in Libya. Before Wadi Majid, the English and the Turks were already at war with each other here in our own country, in Egypt. The Turks wanted to open a second front against the English. So, they went to Sayid Ahmad Al Sanusi in Libya and told him, "We want you to build an army and to start a government and we are ready to back and finance those things related to the army," such as clothes and food and weapons.

The Arabs were hearing all of this, and Al Sanusi made his rounds of the Arabs and said to them, "We want, from each family, two or three to ride as soldiers." The Arabs responded favorably, and each family gave up men to

form his army. The Turks told him to go to the Egyptian borders, to Sallum. Sayid Ahmad said, "I do not want to go beyond Sallum. Sallum is my border. Egypt is not a Libyan territory."

The Sanusi army remained near the border. Then there was movement. The Germans were sending this army food and ammunition by boats to Marsa Matruh and to Sidi Barrani and to Sallum. The English moved to stop these boats. Al Sanusi needed these supplies; his army was starving. And he moved and crossed the border and came as far as Marsa Matruh. The English came and confronted Al Sanusi's army. The Awlad 'Ali fought on the side of Al Sanusi. All the Arabs here fought with him. After all, the Sanusiya are Muslims and the others are Christians.

The English came in big cars with some kind of heavy metal. They had big weapons and cannons. The Arabs had almost no weapons. The English had machine-guns. They killed many Arabs, and they killed the horses and the camels. Snow came out to inspect the battlefield. Snow was the English governor. He came out to Wadi Majid. There were many bodies of men who were dead. And there were those who were wounded. Snow went to the body of one who seemed to be dead. But they said that wounded man shot and killed him. Snow's tomb is in Marsa Matruh.

But at that time the Arabs had no strength. They had no weapons. Things were bad, and life was difficult then. No agriculture, no water. The English did nothing for the desert except destroy it. They never brought agriculture. No water, nothing. The English fought the Sanusiya back into Libya and then they returned back here, and they stayed in Egypt. And they left the desert as it was.

The governor of Matruh was English. One was Snow, and another one was Bailey. And Royle. These were the English leaders in the desert. The English controlled Egypt. I don't remember who the khedive was at that time. The ones I remember are Fu'ad and Faruq. And Gamal Abdel-Nasser.

Another elderly senior, always vigilant against the Turks and quick to read sinister political motives into past events, stressed other dimensions in his interpretation of the 1915–16 events. This man said,

When there was the war of the Turks and Sidi Ahmad Al Sanusi, the Arabs thought it was a religious war. But it was a trick. The Turks, when they wanted to open a front here, brought in Sidi Ahmad Al Sanusi. He told the Arabs that it was a religious war. Of course, this was politics; and the Turks forced Sidi Ahmad Al Sanusi to do this. It was a trick from the Turks.

The Arabs were deceived. They joined Sidi Ahmad Al Sanusi. They were poor and had no food. They were almost dying of hunger. The Sanusiya told

them that whoever kills an Englishman will get to heaven. So, of course, everybody joined Sidi Ahmad Al Sanusi. And those who joined him died of hunger. The few soldiers left behind by Sidi Ahmad Al Sanusi ate up the sheep of the Arabs here.

The Arabs here who fought with him were then attacked by the English. But some joined the English when they saw that their war was not getting them anywhere. It was politics.

Politics or not, those who fought against the British are said to have done so with bravery and valor. According to a British official,

[T]he Bedouin horsemen of the Western Desert in 1915, who stood their ground beside their ponies against a hail of machine-gun fire from armoured cars and plugged shot after shot at the steel plating, vainly trying to find some vulnerable spot in the strange monsters, at least showed dogged courage and determination (Kennett 1968 [1925]:150–151).

After the end of the First World War, the British reorganized the administrative structure for Egypt's desert territories. A new department, the Frontiers Administration, was created to take over and police these areas. According to Jarvis (1936:3), the new department was “the illegitimate offspring of the British Army out of the Residency, and the Egyptian Ministry of Finance was asked to accept paternity.” Always underfinanced, the Frontiers Administration was mainly staffed by unqualified personnel. As Jarvis put it,

[S]ome of the [British] officials sent to us were hardly suited to the work . . . The result . . . was somewhat chaotic owing to a complexity of policies and practically every man started his own hare and hunted it . . . The Administration . . . tried to run before it could walk and almost immediately started on extensive building programmes and wild-cat schemes for the betterment of the Arab race dictated by individuals profoundly ignorant of their ways or line of thought, or, to quote Lord Lloyd, “unenlightened instruction coming from uninstructed sentimentalism” (*ibid*:15).

Concerning the Egyptian staff, Jarvis comments that the government sent them “discards—from weakness not from strength—and pensioners” (*ibid*:13).

In the new administration, the governor was British and lower-level officials were Egyptians from the Nile Valley. Under this system, as elderly men from the Awlad ‘Ali explained to us, the governors often presented them-

selves as kind and sympathetic and appeared to take an interest in their affairs. However, the British governors set the policies and made all the decisions, which were then implemented by the Nile Valley Egyptian *ma'mur*, “police chief,” and other lower-level officials. Many of these decisions were not popular, especially those that resulted in arresting people and putting them in jail. Those who implemented such decisions were very unpopular, but the old men who recall such events today recognize that those who should be blamed are the British governors who made the decisions and not the Egyptian officials who were forced to implement them. A senior Awlad ‘Ali ‘aqila described the system as follows:

The military administration was severe, but it also had some good points. There was injustice. Back then, if you had a disagreement with the *ma'mur*, you would go to speak to the governor. The *ma'mur* would speak to the governor by phone and tell him that you are a troublemaker, dirty, wrong. The governor would have you put in jail and you would stay there for three, four months, a year, without trial. You were under the control of the English governor. He had the rank of *amir alai*. He could let you go or keep you in jail. But you can say [the administration] was good because there was the maintenance of law and order.

There were many English people here, and the Arabs stole from them. And it was not bad to steal from them. The Arabs here stole from the English army, took whatever they wanted. We hate the English. And the person who steals from him is not a thief. In fact, we tell him “thank you.” The English were the enemy. But this was also bad because the practice of stealing was instilled in the youth.

Another elderly senior provided a more general, overall evaluation of the role of the British in Matruh, and said,

We did not benefit from the English. That was colonialism. And no benefit can come from colonialism. Colonialism has a *siyasa kabira* [“grand political strategy”]. The English had a *siyasa kabira*: make use of the Arabs but let them keep their customs and don’t interfere in their affairs as long as they stick to their own business.

The English kill you without your noticing it. The Arabs did not have a *siyasa kabira* at that time. They did not care about the English.

When all of Nile Valley Egypt rose up against the British in 1919, the Bedouin in Matruh remained silent (see Jarvis 1936:20–26). An elderly senior explained to us that “the Arabs fought the English here in the 1914 War. The

Egyptians did not fight the English at that time. In 1919, the battle was in the Nile Valley. It was not here."

The Second World War

Between the world wars, the Frontiers Administration in the northwest coast was mainly concerned with policing the area. However, the railroad was completed and Marsa Matruh began to grow, with modest support and supervision by the administration. Workers from the Nile Valley came on construction projects and, as noted, some of these settled in the community and brought their families and relatives to join them. A few small hotels were built, mainly by Greeks. Some of the Bedouin from nearby areas and some of the settlers from the Nile Valley acquired title to *numar*, "numbers;" "lots," that were sold by the administration and began to set up shops and other buildings.

Some modest attempts were also made by the administration to introduce olive trees and figs in gardens near the coast. Figs introduced in the more eastern parts of the northwest coast had considerable success. In the west of Matruh, at Qasr, olives were introduced, with mixed results. Some of the problems with the new agriculture, however, had more to do with politics and warfare than with technical issues of new desert agriculture. As an elderly Awlad 'Ali senior recalled,

The new agriculture started with olives. I don't know who exactly introduced them. But the government was involved and gave us one piaster per tree. We had Roman cisterns and the *sawani* [underground galleries] for irrigation. One piaster was enough to cover the cultivation of that tree and more. The governor and the inspector used to come around to examine the trees. They used to look at the soil just below the tree. If it were moist, they would commend the farmer. It was not such hard work, and things seemed to be going well.

Then war broke out. There was Mussolini and he started another war in Libya. And we had five years without rain. Some of the trees died; and we stayed this way until 1939. Then, in 1940, the Second World War broke out around us. The English cut down the trees and made bunkers. My father asked an Englishman, "Why do you cut down the tree?" The Englishman said, "Mussolini wants my head, and you worry about the tree!" Also, the English used the trees to camouflage their equipment and cars. So, the war spoiled that project.

Second World War battles across North Africa are well known and need not be recounted in any detail. One of the major battles was, of course, at 'Alamain, with Germans and Italians on one side and the British on the other. This battle and other fighting in the northwest coast had nothing to do with the local people, but the war had an enormous impact on the Awlad 'Ali and everybody else in the region. Although half a century had passed since 'Alamain, almost everybody we spoke with mentioned the Second World War and the suffering it caused. One of the most comprehensive statements we recorded is the following by an elderly senior of the Awlad 'Ali:

I was born in 1929. I was twelve years old at the time of the war. During the Second World War, we were in the middle of the battlefield. The English ordered that all of the Arabs in the desert from Sallum to 'Alamain must leave. All the people living here were forced to move to 'Amriya and to Burj al-'Arab and those areas. They were moved to the Nile Valley. The English left the battlefield empty of its people.

The English and the Italians fought each other first at Sidi Barrani. Barrani is where the Italians made their first entry into Egypt. The English met them there, defeated them and chased them back to Banghazi. Back in the Nile Valley, it was crowded with all the people from here. So the English gave permission to people with animals to move back. We were among those who got permission to come back, and we came back. This was about 1942. Then the Germans came and we did not have time to leave.

The Germans moved into Matruh swiftly and encircled us. We stayed here. The Germans pushed out the English. And we, the Arabs, nobody cared anything about us. Nobody asked anything about us. We stayed here eating whatever we had for six months. We could not move about and there was very little herding. We used to take things the English army had left behind. The defeated army had abandoned equipment and cars with stuff in them. We used to take that. Things like flour, rice, sugar, tea. The Italian army was here, and they were tired, hungry, very bad people. They took things from us to eat.

Six months later, the English did the same thing to the Germans that the Germans had done to them. The English took the German army by surprise. Also, the Italians. Both the Germans and the Italians left this time and did not come back again. They left North Africa completely.

Awlad 'Ali and others from Matruh have grim memories of the 1940s. They often mentioned crowding and lack of adequate food and water in the Nile Valley camps where many were displaced for up to three years. Most of the

animals people tried to take with them died along the way or "were expropriated by the British" (Obermeyer 1968:17). In addition to cutting down trees, the different armies destroyed houses and ruined cisterns. The foreign armies fighting their own battles on the land of other people also left behind millions of anti-tank and anti-personnel land mines. These claimed the lives of many and injured huge numbers of people. Half a century later, most of those mines remain, forcing people to avoid many areas. They still cause injury. Indeed, we encountered a young boy, not far from Marsa Matruh, who had recently lost an eye and still wore a bandage. He had been injured by a fifty-year-old land mine planted by the "civilized" British, Germans, or Italians.

CHAPTER 4

Urban Growth, Sedentarization, and Local Government

The aftermath of the Second World War was exceedingly bleak for the people of Matruh. According to Bujra (1973:144),

[T]he Bedouin returned to their areas to find them full of mines, all buildings destroyed, and many wells blown up. They had no stock of barley to feed themselves, and most of them had lost considerable numbers of animals, stored food, and capital equipment (such as tents and carpets).

Town dwellers found their homes and shops deteriorated, if not destroyed. People struggled and began to rebuild their lives without assistance from the outside world.

The Bedouin scoured the countryside to scavenge what they could of the rubbish left behind by the armies. A few built housing out of some of this material and others took shelter in a few buildings the armies had constructed. They sold most of the war debris in Alexandria and Tubruk to merchants who exported it for handsome profits. With the modest amounts of money they received, the Bedouin began to buy a few sheep and goats and to rebuild their herds. Rainfall in the late 1940s was good. The range blossomed, and barley harvests were bounteous. However, almost no rain fell in 1950; and 1952, 1953, and 1954 were very dry years. Meanwhile, people and animals faced death or serious injury from the ubiquitous land mines.

The Egyptian military continued to administer and police the northwest coast until 1962, when the state extended its civilian system of local government to all of the Western Desert. The governorate of Matruh was created under the same administrative structure that prevailed in the Nile Valley. The general desert development organization, locally referred to as the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*, began to be active in the area in 1962. Meanwhile oil was discovered in neighboring Libya, and the new economy that developed there began to have significant impacts in the northwest coast.

Change quickened in pace, and its scope widened in the 1960s. Urbanization, sedentarization, and the introduction of local government were especially important and are the foci of this chapter. Public schools and health units were also set up and roads were upgraded and expanded. The Arab Socialist Union, Egypt's official state party (now known as the National Democratic Party), became active in the region. Agricultural cooperative societies were established. People were issued state identity cards, and Bedouin youth once again served in the armed forces. International development programs appeared on the scene and, in concert with the Egyptian state, provided food aid and subsidized fodder and assistance for building a house or digging a cistern. Markets expanded, and waged labor and salaried employment opportunities multiplied. The region's ancient livestock and crop production systems began to be transformed. Tourists sunning themselves on the beach were also a new sight for the people of Matruh.

When speaking about change in the northwest coast, local people usually preface their remarks by saying that the rule here had been that of the border guards or the military. The state's new civilian involvement, they suggest, was a major and positive break with the past. Some of the local people had long dealt with state officials, but the new civil servants and teachers and other professionals were different from the old colonial officials and the military officers. They were less remote and more actively engaged in the region's development.

The local people were seldom consulted by the new civilian officials about what changes should be introduced—but the people were not passive recipients of the exogenous changes. They often bent development programs and crafted institutions to meet needs as they themselves defined them. Moreover, trade and a monetized economy were not innovations for the Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin, and they energetically pursued new opportunities for profit and other cash income. What the state, development agencies, and local people did during the 1960s defines major parameters of the regional scene today.

The Growth of Marsa Matruh

At the end of the nineteenth century, Marsa Matruh was chosen by the Egyptian state as a site for a

coast-guard post to protect the Egyptian fishing area from illegal fishing by Greek seamen, as well as to prevent Libyans from crossing the border and

penetrating deep into Egypt to find richer grazing grounds for their sheep and even to smuggle Egyptian livestock to the then poor Libyan territories (Abou-Zeid 1979:284).

As mentioned earlier, a Sanusiya lodge and a Greek settlement were also established there, and Khedive Abbas Hilmi II had planned for Marsa Matruh to develop as a major commercial center. However, only 930 people resided there in 1927. Twenty years later, in 1947, the town's population had almost quadrupled to 3,362. In 1960 Marsa Matruh's population reached 7,254, and then increased to 11,039 by 1966. During the next ten years, Marsa Matruh had an annual growth rate of 15.24 percent, "the highest in Egypt," and reached 27,857 in 1976 (*ibid*). The city had a population of 43,192 in 1986 and continues to grow rapidly.

Marsa Matruh is located on a beautiful bay about halfway between Alexandria and the Libyan border. Most of the city is situated on the narrow coastal plain between the sea and the plateau. Thus, when arriving by car from Alexandria, one descends from the plateau, crosses the railroad, and is then on Marsa Matruh's main thoroughfare, Alexandria Street, which runs straight down to the sea. Smaller streets run parallel and perpendicular to Alexandria Street according to a grid pattern locally said to have been laid out by the British.

The town center is surrounded by unplanned quarters that do not follow the grid pattern. These other parts of the city include the Lux area directly on the sea and a number of *'izab*, "settlements," that developed to the east, west, and south of the town center. During the past twenty years or so, various public housing projects have been constructed at sites outside the town center and the Lux area, especially up on the plateau.

A university-educated Bedouin woman recounted what she remembers of Marsa Matruh in the 1960s. In part, she is a product of changes introduced back then. Her early childhood was spent on the range outside of Sidi Barrani where her family herded sheep and cultivated barley and a few vegetables and melons. Her father took a job with the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* and brought his wife and children to Marsa Matruh. She managed, with some difficulty, to go to school, and was one of the first girls from the northwest coast to graduate from secondary school. She continued her studies in the Nile Valley and achieved a degree in veterinary medicine. Upon her return to Marsa Matruh, she first worked as a veterinarian in a large poultry project and later on took a position as women's affairs officer in a development project. Like most of her male counterparts who have received modern educations, she strongly identifies herself as Bedouin. In her words,

We came here in the 1960s from Sidi Barrani. It was about 1963, and I was seven years old. We still have land in Barrani which is with my paternal uncles and cousins. My father got a job with the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* here in [Marsa] Matruh. We lived in a small house; and the town had very few things at that time. There were no cooperative stores, no Banzion or Omar Effendi [department stores]—just a few very small shops. One very small vegetable market was in the town center. And one shop that sold fish, two butchers, and one bakery that belonged to Upper Egyptians. There were three *baqala* ["grocery stores"] owned by Bedouin that sold *ful* ["beans"], *halawani* [a sweet], honey, cheese, tea, sugar—things like that. Greek families lived in the town center and had shops there. Also, some Magharba [a Libyan people].

There were schools, two primary schools. And I entered one of them. One mixed school existed for the intermediate level, and the secondary school had only one or two classes at that time. Very few girls were in the schools; if you had twenty boys in a class, maybe there would be two girls.

The shore was all empty, except for some camps of the *hajana*. That is the area now known as Lux; but people used to be afraid to go to the shore back then. We lived in the '*izba al-gharbiya* ["Western settlement"]. It was exactly like the desert. There were big distances between the houses. There was no agriculture. People lived a very simple life then. We lived in only one room at first; and my father rented it. Then we built our own place. My father bought the land, 450 [square] meters, for five pounds. Land west of the town center belonged to the 'Ashaibat and the Qinaishat, but we bought our plot from the Afrad, whose own territories are far away.

The people who lived next to us were all just like us. They had come from the desert to settle. They were from different tribes, from various areas. The '*izba*' was big. Aside from us, people in our area came from the Qit'an, 'Ashaibat, Qinaishat, Ma'abda, and other tribes. But the spaces between houses were large, and, later on, people were able to buy these lands to build houses. Some of these were Arabs and others were Egyptians. Today, our neighborhood is mixed—Bedouin and migrants together.

The water came by train [from Alexandria]. There was a tank with a faucet. It was far from where we lived, almost a kilometer away. We used to take jugs and fill them up with water, my mother and I, every morning.

In the past, we used to leave our doors open and go to visit our relatives who lived in the '*izba ash-sharqiya* ["Eastern settlement"]. Arabs and Sudanese lived there. The Arabs there were from various tribes. However, you do find that some tribes aggregated together, like the Afrad or the 'Abaidi. The Afrad have two '*izab*', one north and the other south. However, people like us from Sidi Barrani were scattered about.

All the houses were small, even in the town center. The 'Umda . . . probably had the only big house. People had small houses; and they were afraid to have windows. They just had small openings. The town was small. There was no theft. No strangers came here. The main transportation out was the train and the buses. The train from Alexandria brought bottled milk. And every evening we used to go to the station about eleven o'clock. It was always very crowded there, with people coming to collect the milk.

Bedouin without milk from their own animals is almost a contradiction in terms. But Marsa Matruh was a town. Its water and most of the food consumed there were brought in from the Nile Valley by train. Many of the Bedouin settled in the town continued to own herds, but their animals were mostly off in the steppe with kinspeople or a contracted shepherd. Meanwhile many of Marsa Matruh's settlers were not Bedouin and thus had neither livestock nor farms in the wider Matruh region.

The development process initiated in the 1960s brought social science research in its wake. Researchers from the Social Research Center (SRC) of the American University in Cairo conducted a census and social survey of Marsa Matruh in 1966 and submitted a report to the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* and the Governorate of Matruh (Bujra 1967). The SRC census enumerated 11,477 people in 2,635 households in Marsa Matruh, results which are very close to those of the government's census of the same year.

According to Bujra, the town's inhabitants made up about 11 percent of the Matruh governorate's total population. Marsa Matruh was obviously expanding rapidly in size, and Bujra attributed this growth to three factors: the establishment of the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* and the location of its regional headquarters in Marsa Matruh, the extension of the local government system to the Matruh governorate and the selection of the town as the governorate's capital, and the development of Marsa Matruh as one of Egypt's most important summer holiday resorts.

The study classified settlers in the new town on the basis of what it called "ethnic origin." Three categories were identified: Bedouin, Nile Valley people, and others. The Bedouin formed 51.2 percent of the town's population, with 5,876 people in 1,113 households. Nile Valley people numbered 4,613, or 40.2 percent of the total. Bedouin households were larger than those of the Nile Valley people (5.28 vs. 3.49 persons per household); therefore, the Nile Valley people had 206 more households than the Bedouin. Others made up 8.6 percent of the population and included 447 Libyans, 292 Sudanese, 88 Siwans, 22 Palestinians, 21 Nubians, 14 Greeks, 10 "others," and 94 who did not state their origin.

The period of migration into Marsa Matruh of the three categories varied significantly. Most (73.05 percent) of the heads of Bedouin households had been born in Marsa Matruh. The remainder had mainly arrived before 1960, but between twelve and twenty-three Bedouin heads of household moved into Marsa Matruh yearly from 1960 to 1966. Most of those who made up the category of others were old settlers like the Bedouin. More than one fourth (27.09 percent) of their household heads had been born in Marsa Matruh, while 26.11 percent of them had moved into Marsa Matruh before 1945. People from this category were still arriving in the 1960s—between three and fifteen a year. The Nile Valley people had a few old settlers, as 4.93 percent of their household heads had been born in Marsa Matruh and another 5 percent had moved there before 1945. A few had come in the late 1940s and 1950s, but most of the Nile Valley people were clearly newcomers. Between 91 and 133 arrived yearly from 1960 through 1964. As many as 426 heads of household arrived from the Nile Valley in 1965.

Bujra asked what did these people do to make a living in this desert town? He noted that the town had no natural resources to sustain this growing population. Agriculture was negligible. Livestock production was very important in the regional economy, but animal resources played an insignificant role in the town. Marsa Matruh had a beautiful beach, but tourism's contribution to the town's economy was marginal. According to Bujra (*ibid*:4),

This is contrary to popular opinion, but it is nevertheless true, since most of the money spent by the large number of holiday-makers goes out of the town and does not bring any but fringe benefits . . . to hotel owners and to the caretta owners and a few shopkeepers.

Moreover, Marsa Matruh had no industries of any type or size and also suffered from a chronic shortage of water.

The town's economy was based on government employment and small-scale private sector enterprises mainly engaged in trade. According to the SRC census, 1,520 heads of household were employed by the government, the town's largest employer by far. These employees included 536 unskilled or semiskilled laborers, 271 clerks, 250 police, 207 directors, 127 professionals, eighty-nine army personnel, and thirty-eight technicians. The private sector provided employment for 924 heads of household and included 448 unskilled or semiskilled laborers, 311 merchants and salesmen in the *sug*, "market," 123 farmers, eleven directors, three clerks, one professional, and thirty-four with "other" occupations. In addition, Marsa Matruh in 1966 had 192 heads of household who said they were not working.

The Bedouin and Nile Valley people were differently distributed between the two sectors and among the various occupational categories. Nile Valley people held about 65 percent of the positions in the government sector, while the Bedouin had about 58 percent of the jobs in the private sector. Ten Bedouin worked as directors or professionals in the government sector, but most Bedouin employed by the government were laborers, police, or in the army. Nile Valley people predominated in occupations that required modern skills and education, while the Bedouin predominated in traditional occupations, such as trade.

Bujra stresses the relatively disadvantaged position of the Bedouin in the town's economy. Relegated by their general lack of modern education to low-skilled work, most Bedouin earned low incomes. They also faced competition in low-skilled jobs by equally uneducated people from the Nile Valley.

A few of the Bedouin were relatively large-scale merchants, but these also faced competition from Nile Valley merchants who came with significant capital to invest in trade. The main advantage some, but not all, Bedouin in the town had was access to additional sources of income—from animals and farms in the desert, from rent of housing to both Bedouin and Nile Valley migrants, and from occasional land sales. Nonetheless, the economic position of most of the town's Bedouin was weak and much less secure than that of the government employees who, in the 1960s, were relatively well paid.

Bujra also stresses that the private sector was mainly limited to what he called "distributive" trade. With the exception of meat and live animals, "none of the goods and food . . . sold either in the town or to those outside it are produced in the area" (*ibid*:5). Most shops in the *sug* sold items produced in the Nile Valley or, increasingly in the 1960s, smuggled in from Libya. As Bujra saw it, the *sug* provided limited opportunities and was highly competitive. The town's private sector also had about ten small hotels, but, as noted, Bujra considered the tourist sector to be marginal to the town's economy.

In his assessment, Marsa Matruh's population was "highly in excess of the economic resources of the area" (*ibid*). Nonetheless, people were migrating into the town. All of the Awlad 'Ali clans had migrants settled in Marsa Matruh, although the Afrah and the 'Azaiym from Awlad 'Ali al-Abiad and the 'Ashaibat and Qinaishat from Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar had significantly more settlers than other Awlad 'Ali. The Jumi'at and various other *murabtin* tribes made up about two-fifths of the Bedouin settlers. In addition to mixed tribal origins, the Bedouin of Marsa Matruh also came from all parts of the Matruh governorate.

Although the Bedouin had a strong presence in Marsa Matruh, Bujra noted that their actual migration rate into the town was low compared to that of the Nile Valley people. About three quarters of the Bedouin had been born there, but many of these were people whose clans had land that was incorporated into the town. According to Bujra, "the Bedouin population born in Marsa Matruh itself is perhaps more than enough, as a source of manpower, to supply the limited economy of the town" (*ibid*:32). Most of the Bedouin who did trickle in during the 1960s were "poor people who have no animal stock and therefore cannot live a 'Bedouin life'" (*ibid*:33).

One of Marsa Matruh's main attractions for the Bedouin was its schools. Urban Bedouin made use of the new educational facilities, and literacy rates among the younger generation were much higher than among the seniors. Moreover, students from Bedouin families outside of Marsa Matruh came to study in the town's schools. By 1966, seven Bedouin in Marsa Matruh had completed university degrees. Bujra expected that within ten year's time the Bedouin would have achieved the necessary education to take over important positions within the government sector. He noted that the governorate's policy was for educated Bedouin to remain in the governorate and to take up these positions. However, he wondered whether such people would choose to remain in Marsa Matruh or move to Alexandria or Cairo "where they can operate within the system of the wider society" (*ibid*:46).

Writing more than ten years later, Abou-Zeid noted that the urban Bedouin had resented the domination of the government sector in Marsa Matruh by "intruders" from the Nile Valley and that many had sent their children to schools and the university,

since education seemed to be the only way that led to highly paid and respectable jobs. Now there are about three hundred young men from Mersa Matrouh studying in Egyptian universities, and at least 50% of them belong to Bedouin families (Abou-Zeid 1979:285–286).

Since the 1960s, Marsa Matruh has expanded and is no longer a town but a small city with more than a quarter of the northwest coast's population. Tourist facilities have grown significantly. "Distributive" trade continues to be important, but the city's markets play important roles in the region's livestock and crop production systems. A medium-sized public sector factory for processing dates and olives existed but was closed down in the early 1990s under Egypt's structural adjustment program prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Numerous small workshops have sprung up to make repairs and to manufacture items such as furniture. Construction firms have mushroomed. Sons of the Nile Valley still predom-

inate in government employment, but the city now has Bedouin who are school teachers, bank officials, lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, and relatively large-scale businessmen. A Bedouin currently holds the position of head of the city council. Migrants from the Nile Valley continue to move into the city. Meanwhile some urban Bedouin are now moving out of Marsa Matruh and back to the range, a result in part of development programs that started in the 1960s.

Sedentarization in the Steppe

Newly independent Arab states and Saudi Arabia (which had not been colonized) began to introduce sedentarization projects in their various desert territories during the 1960s. Nomads were widely viewed as a problem, a segment of the population that would have to undergo significant change before it could be incorporated into a modern economy and society. Almost all officials and, where they existed, political party personnel were similar in background to the government employees in Marsa Matruh. They came from the sedentary component of Arab society and were much more familiar with agriculture than with pastoralist production.

Ethnocentrically, they assumed their own way of life was more advanced, more modern, than that of the nomadic Bedouin. Some officials recognized the genealogical aristocracy of Arab nomads and many perceived them as exemplars of ancient Arab traditions or values such as hospitality, honor, and bravery. However, most officials and other urban Arabs also thought of them as an anachronism, and some were embarrassed by their continued presence on the scene. For these, nomads were a sign of backwardness and a nuisance in a modern orderly state. Almost all mistakenly believed that contemporary nomadic pastoralism represented a primitive stage in evolution that predated agriculture. According to Abou-Zeid, they also believed that "nomadism and semi-nomadism are wasteful and destructive" (1968:280).

The newly created Arab League noted the need to protect the Bedouin at meetings in 1949 and 1950 and, in 1952, officially called for their full sedentarization. The sedentarization goal of the Arab League and of Arab governments was strongly supported by various specialized agencies of the newly formed United Nations—including its Educational, Science, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), World Food Program (WFP), and the International Labor Organization (ILO). The development goals promoted by all these organizations for the arid range lands of the Arab world were sedentarization and agricultural colonization. However, the for-

mulation of these goals by both Arab and international experts was almost never based on the results of empirical field research but was guided by politics and, in some cases, by prejudice (see Bocco 1993:327–332).

Nomads, of course, do cause problems for a centralized, bureaucratic state with territorial borders. Inter-Arab borders, mostly demarcated by colonial powers, were not respected by the Bedouin who crossed them to take their herds to greener pastures, to visit relatives, to seek employment, to buy and sell in markets, and/or to seek benefits from this state and that state. Although valid statistical data do not exist, nomadic Bedouin in the 1950s and 1960s probably had the highest infant mortality rates of any component of Arab society, and they certainly had almost no access to modern health care and education. They also did not have an address and were thus difficult to tax, to conscript into military service, and to enumerate in censuses—all of which displeases bureaucrats.

It is within this context of seeming disorder that Abou-Zeid (1968:280) writes of the “vehement impetus of the different governments, and indeed the regional and international organizations, to push the nomads to a settled and more secure life” and accuses the governments and organizations of a “hostile attitude toward nomadism and the nomadic way of life.” Mohsen (1975:14) also writes of the Egyptian state’s “need” in the 1960s “to control the tribal population” of Matruh through sedentarization. Abou-Zeid (1979:286) further indicates that the one main objective of the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* was “to change the Bedouin from nomadism to agriculture.”

With hindsight more than thirty years later, the control and agricultural dimensions of sedentarization seem exaggerated. These dimensions existed, but the process of change that took place was more varied and complex than just settling the Bedouin as farmers so as to have better control over them.

One major motive behind early sedentarization projects was a devastating drought in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Millions of head of livestock were lost in greater Syria and northern Arabia, and their Bedouin herders were cast into dire circumstances. Forced to abandon their ranges, these Bedouin took refuge in the outskirts of villages and towns where they lived in makeshift shacks or tattered tents and took whatever work they could find (Cole 1975:34; Lewis 1987:170–192). The King Faisal Settlement Project at Haradh was a direct response of the Saudi Arabian state to the devastation caused by the drought. This project sought to exploit a deep and large aquifer to provide a secure agricultural foundation for a thousand Bedouin families (Cole 1975:146–151). Similar projects were established in Jordan (Abu Jaber, Gharaibeh, and Hill 1987:110–116). These projects did not achieve their original sedentarization goals. The drought ended, and many Bedouin returned to the ranges. Other Bedouin preferred to pursue income-

generating activities in urban occupations in the newly developing national economies. Moreover, standardized houses located close together and cheaply built out of concrete blocks were no match for the Bedouin's ancestral goat hair tents or the simple adobe and stone houses they sometimes constructed. Nonetheless, the settlement projects indicate that Arab states in the 1960s were concerned about the welfare of the nomads, even if we now recognize that settlement as full-time, small-scale farmers on arid lands was not an attractive alternative for most of the desert pastoralists.

The concern of Arab states to extend modern health care and education to the nomadic component of their populations was also genuine. However, government school teachers and doctors did not, and do not, have the motivations of the old religiously inspired *Ikhwan* of the Sanusiya to wander from camp to camp to impart knowledge in return for nothing more than food and shelter. The extension of modern social services into the vast steppes required the formation of centers where schools and other services could be located.

Indeed, numerous settlements mushroomed in the Arabian steppes around new wells sunk at state expense. A simple mosque would be built, and a trader would set up a small store. A one or two room school followed; and Bedouin youth in the 1960s began to leave their families to gain at least rudimentary education from the school teachers sent by the state. With time, a small community of Bedouin settlers emerged. These new settlements developed spontaneously to a large degree; but the government well and the government schoolhouse provided the catalysts for their growth (Cole 1971:236–239).

In 1960 most of the Awlad 'Ali, Jumi'at, and other Bedouin in Matruh lived in winter tents and summer tents and were nomadic. Many still keep tents for ritual occasions; and shepherds and other workers use them on a temporary basis if required to travel to a distant pasture or barley field. However, Bedouin in the northwest coast are now sedentary and reside in permanent housing. Today, holiday-makers visiting the area are much more likely to reside in tents than are the Bedouin.

Some of the Awlad 'Ali and others began to build permanent housing in the eastern part of Matruh by 1900 or so. A few built stone houses on the range near Marsa Matruh around the time of the First World War. However, development programs of the Egyptian state supported by international agencies provided major catalysts for their widespread sedentarization. The arrival of the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* in 1962 and a WFP project in 1963 especially marked the beginning of this transformation.

Although land reclamation in desert areas remote from the Nile Valley was one of its principal mandates, the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* directly reclaimed

little land in the northwest coast. However, the agency provided the institutional base for the distribution of aid and coordinated the activities of agricultural cooperative societies first introduced by the state into the region in 1959-60. The WFP agreed to assist the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* to reduce nomadism and to encourage mixed farming and livestock production by sedentarized Bedouin. A project was agreed between the government of Egypt and the WFP in July 1963, whereby the WFP would provide \$3,409,000 worth of food and fodder and the government of Egypt would cover all local expenses of the project (Abou-Zeid nd:27-30). This project is the prototype for almost all development projects that have followed during the past thirty years or so. The Egyptian state covers a part of the project expenses and provides overall supervision through the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* or its successor agency, the authority for the development of the northwest coast and Siwa. Additional project costs and technical assistance are provided by foreign governments and international agencies, which have included the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, WFP, FAO, and the World Bank. According to an educated man in his early forties from the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar,

The basic system introduced in the sixties has continued, even with different donors. People go to the various offices in Marsa Matruh to apply for aid and indicate what they want. An engineer, usually an employee of the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*, goes out to look at the site you want to develop and determines whether your project is viable. If the engineer gives his approval, then you begin the work yourself. You get materials and the workers, and the government or the agency compensates you. They pay you according to a generous evaluation of the cost, but not the total costs. The project usually costs you something, in addition to the labor you and your family provide. They do not force you to use their laborers or their contractors.

The first WFP project targeted about four thousand families, or twenty thousand people, to receive aid in the form of food and fodder against nominal payment. Beneficiaries had to be members of agricultural cooperative societies, which were to keep proceeds from the sale of food and fodder for their own activities and to purchase farm equipment. A second WFP project specifically provided assistance for the construction of housing. According to the man quoted above,

I think that the World Food Program was the most successful of all the programs that have assisted us. I worked with them in Qasr, where I was in charge of the warehouse where food was kept. The World Food Program

project had two phases. At first, they gave food aid—wheat flour, Kraft cheese, dried fish, and *bulubif* (“corned beef”). Of course, the Arabs did not like any of this, except the flour. They sold most of it in the market, and it provided a bit of income. Later on, the World Food Program supported housing, and this was very important.

As far as housing is concerned, a contribution came from foreign aid, and a loan was provided by the Egyptian government. This loan had to be paid back over ten years after a five-year grace period. Aid for building houses, of course, only went to the Bedouin. The World Food Program had the aim of settling the Bedouin.

Of course, if we take people from Qasr as an example, we all wanted to settle. We have been settled for a long time, maybe before anybody else. But many others were first tempted to settle by the aid provided through the World Food Program. Not everybody settled back then, but many did. In the past, people used to move, and they did not think about services like health and education. All they wanted was their grazing lands and to plant a bit of barley. Schooling became easier with settlement; but, of course, many deficiencies still remain.

He further explained that the government extended the loan for housing when one started to build the foundations of the house. Food aid was given when one proceeded to build its structure, “and people take the food to the market, sell it, and use the money to complete the house.” The state provided wooden beams for the ceiling, window frames, a door, and a gate free of charge. Finally, a small cash settling-in allowance was provided. He calculates that the total amount of aid given was equivalent to about \$1,000, which was sufficient “to build a house with two rooms and a reception room.”

The Bedouin were their own architects and made their own decisions about where to locate the house. Construction involved crews of Upper Egyptian workers, along with family labor in most cases. Most of the houses have the same style. Walls are usually built out of stone covered with a brownish yellow plaster. Floors are concrete slabs. Most houses have a porch with two or three columns. The men’s reception room has a direct entrance through a door from the porch. Another door leads to an interior hallway that runs to the back of the house. Two or more bedrooms are on either side of the hallway, with a kitchen and often a bathroom inside the house.

The Bedouin located their new houses within their lineage territories. Generally, people based on the coastal plain or near wadis running down to the sea were the first to settle, usually near or on patches of land where their fathers and grandfathers had planted barley and/or other crops. The most recent settlers are those based in the interior on the plateau where livestock-

raising especially predominates. Relatives tend to remain clustered together, although some members of kindreds moved away and settled in Marsa Matruh or other urban places. Also, some Bedouin from different kindreds eventually moved into larger settlements such as Qasr village. However, settlement on the range did not involve a significant break with the segmentary descent system of lineages and clans.

The resulting dispersed settlement pattern of isolated homesteads and small clusters of houses scattered about the countryside accords well with the regional ecology. People are near farms and pastures. However, this type of settlement pattern does not facilitate the provision of social services such as education and health care. The state set up primary schools and some basic health units at convenient locations near the international highway in the western part of Matruh and in larger settlements near the coast. Nonetheless, school children often have to walk for a couple of hours or more to get to school. School teachers and health care workers feel lonely in the remote locations, and their absentee rates are said to be high. Moreover, such facilities in the interior are all but nonexistent.

Many Awlad 'Ali, Jumi'at, and other Bedouin who have benefited from development programs complain about the poverty their relatives in the interior continue to face. As one man pointed out, "Not everybody profited from projects in the past. Those in the interior often did not know about them. And many did not know how to go to the employees and ask for things."

Sedentarization involves much more than changing one's home from a mobile tent to a stationary house. Agricultural cooperative societies played an important role in the overall process of sedentarization. Thirty-nine cooperative societies set up by the state existed in 1965, and 160 branch societies were organized by the Bedouin themselves. About 62 percent of the Bedouin were members of cooperatives in 1967. The Bedouin explained the popularity of the movement by saying they were "natural socialists," while the government said the movement "meets the needs of the people" (Bujra 1973:143).

However, Abou-Zeid (nd:30-34) criticized the authorities for failing to explain the philosophy and principles of the cooperative movement to the Bedouin. The cooperatives had especially grown with the introduction of the WFP project, and people wrongly concluded that "cooperation" meant "aid." Abou-Zeid felt that the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* had been overly keen to please influential clans and lineages and had allowed the proliferation of too many branch societies. He noted that '*umdas* and "rich merchants" usually constituted the boards of directors of the cooperatives and "frequently misuse their authority and deprive the poor tribesmen from [benefits]."

cooperatives had also not wisely invested the income they received from the sale of food and fodder. Still, Abou-Zeid thought the cooperatives could play a positive role in development if the '*umdas* and wealthy merchants were replaced as leaders by younger and more qualified people with a "better understanding of the principles of the cooperative movement."

Nonetheless, aid channeled through the cooperatives had multiple impacts on the local economy with unforeseen effects that fostered more comprehensive development than one might imagine from just the distribution of food and fodder aid. Bujra (1973:149) correctly saw these commodities as a form of supplementary income. The fodder contributed to the rebuilding of herds that had been decimated by the Second World War and subsequent drought. With more and better fed livestock, animal sales increased, markets in Marsa Matruh and other towns were stimulated, and more income flowed into the pockets of livestock-raisers and -traders. The sale of excess fodder and unwanted food by the Bedouin also increased the flow of money within the region. Bedouin used this money to purchase other consumer items, but many also invested in digging a cistern or in building a house. These activities stimulated the construction sector and provided job opportunities for both Bedouin and Nile Valley people and led to greater diversification in the regional economy. Meanwhile tractors provided through the cooperatives freed the Bedouin labor force from time-consuming manual agricultural work and allowed many to take up other occupations in the wider economy.

A Libyan connection also existed in this process of change. The development of the oil industry there resulted in many Libyan Bedouin leaving their own pastoralist and farming activities for employment in the oil industry or government jobs and for work in trade in towns and small cities that began to grow rapidly during the 1960s. With increased income, Libyans began to spend more on meat, which created a high demand for mutton. Foreign consumer products also began to be imported into Libya with little or no customs duties.

Meanwhile Egypt had adopted a policy of import substitution, and high customs duties were imposed on almost all imported items. Egypt, in the interest of food security, also imposed restrictions on food exports, including live animals.

With the rapid expansion of the Libyan economy, many Egyptians, among them Bedouin from the northwest coast, flocked to Libya in search of job opportunities. Many of the Bedouin worked as herders, replacing their Libyan counterparts who had taken other employment but still owned herds. Some Bedouin from the northwest coast also engaged in trade with Libya, much of which was illegal. A high demand existed in Egypt for the

consumer products imported into Libya, while a high demand existed in Libya for mutton raised in the northwest coast. Therefore, some Bedouin obliged the two markets and served as intermediaries between them. A few made fortunes out of this smuggling, but most were small-scale operators who put themselves at considerable risk and danger to make only a little money.

People in the northwest coast openly admit to the smuggling and point to a street in Marsa Matruh which was known as *suq at-taharib*, "contraband market." Smuggled consumer items were openly sold there in the 1960s. According to an '*aqila* from the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar, "Trade with Libya made some people rich. Smuggling became the source of wealth. Today, there is smuggling—but not clean smuggling as in the past." Most of the people of Matruh condemn the smuggling that takes place today because it is "unclean"—that is, it involves drugs, which are not only banned by the state but forbidden by religion. The goods illegally imported in the past were only banned by the state.

Smuggling raises serious political and legal issues, and some Awlad 'Ali argue that it had negative social consequences for families and lineages. However, income earned from smuggling was often invested in constructing houses and developing new agriculture. Also, many earned money legally in Libya and invested significantly in development back in the northwest coast. Moreover, as an educated young man from the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar pointed out, "When the border with Libya was closed [in the early 1970s] and the smuggling was stopped, the development projects were underway. People returned and almost everybody settled down."

The state's goal of sedentarization was achieved. Whether the state gained the control it wished to have is questionable. The Bedouin settled according to their own designs. They took the assistance the state sponsored and used it according to their own purposes. They challenged state authority by smuggling but invested profits back in Egypt. The economic system that began to expand during the 1960s firmly linked the region into the wider national economy, while the new local government system created stronger political ties between the region and the rest of Egypt.

Local Government

Local government authorities spent about \$9,000,000 from 1962 through 1966 to create the administration and to extend social services such as education and health care into the Western Desert, including the northwest coast. The local government system and the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* also brought

in about eight thousand government employees from the Nile Valley, and "an elaborate superstructure of bureaucracy . . . was created overnight, with which the Bedouin had to deal" (Bujra 1973:145).

The Egyptian state, like other Arab states, is highly centralized. It has a strong presidency and maintains a top-down approach to administration and governance. Two more or less parallel administrative branches exist. One branch is composed of central ministries such as interior, agriculture and land reclamation, development and new communities, education and training, tourism, and so on. These ministries are headquartered in Cairo and, where appropriate, have offices in governorate capitals and other places. Each ministry has its own budget and operates nationally. The police, for example, come under the ministry of interior, and their deployment around the country is determined centrally in Cairo. The ministry of education in Cairo runs the school system throughout the country. This includes setting the curriculum and determining the content and dates of exams.

According to a university-educated man from the Awlad 'Ali, the ministry of education also categorizes its teachers into three ranks. The best qualified are in the top rank and are deployed to teach in the urban governorates of Cairo and Alexandria and the urban part of Giza. The next best qualified are sent to urban communities in other Nile Valley governorates and to the Suez Canal region. The least well qualified teachers, according to him, are deployed to the governorate of Matruh. Whether true or not, a perception that ministries send their more poorly qualified employees to the northwest coast is widely shared by local people and reminds one of comments cited earlier by Jarvis about the poor qualifications of personnel in the Frontiers Administration during the days of the British.

We can vouch, however, for the existence in Marsa Matruh of highly qualified and dedicated civil servants, at least one of whom is a sterling example of the best of Egypt's administrators. This man, who has spent a long career in the region and has administered many of the development programs there, is widely known and well-regarded by local people. However, most of them consider him to be an exception to the rule. Generally, teachers and civil servants who have long resided in the area or were born there are well-regarded. People's condemnation is mainly directed against those who came and left and some recent arrivals.

The second branch of Egypt's administrative structure is its system of local government. A ministry of local government maintains headquarters in Cairo and has responsibility for managing and operating this system throughout the country. For the purposes of local government, Egypt is divided into governorates, each one of which is headed by a governor appointed by the president of the republic. Most but not all governors have

been, and are, men with former careers in the military or police forces where many achieved the rank of general. Governors are seldom from the governorates in which they serve. According to a statement reportedly made by President Sadat, a governor should be like a president in his governorate.

Governorates are sub-divided into districts—the *hai* in large urban centers and the *markiz* in rural areas and desert governorates. A *markiz* consists of a central village or town and dependent villages or hamlets, and also constitutes a police and census district. The various units of local government have councils composed of executives employed by the government and representatives who are supposed to be elected. Somewhat confusingly, the bodies of executives and representatives are also called councils (see El-Hamamsy and Cole 1986:8–25; Radwan 1994:10–40).

The governorate of Matruh has a governorate council, eight district councils, the Marsa Matruh city council, and several village councils—each with executive and popular councils. A head of the popular council of a village council is a man in his sixties from the Awlad ‘Ali al-Ahmar. He explained that his village council derives from a unit set up by the Arab Socialist Union in the early 1960s. He said, “The Socialist Union divided the different governorates into units. I was a member; and the Awlad ‘Ali al-Ahmar was the dominant tribe in the Socialist Union here in Matruh.” He also recalled that when the Arab Socialist Union first established a unit in the area of his village, members of his lineage (*‘aila*) invited the governor to lunch and told him they wanted to limit membership in the unit to their lineage mates “because we don’t like those other people [in the community].” The governor explained that this was not possible, since divisions based on kinship did not accord with the principles of socialism. Later on, the village was included in the Marsa Matruh city council but now has its own village council. A police station was set up in the village in 1964. “But they never received a single complaint. Not one disturbance. So the police packed up and left after several years.”

This man indicated that the executive council consists of government employees such as the school principal, the doctor, and the head of the police station (“if we still had a police station”). These people are deployed to the village through the governorate, but their salaries are paid by the central ministries that employ them.

The popular council is composed of twenty people from the community who serve “for four years, sometimes five years.” He said these members had always been men, but “a woman could be a member of the council; if we had a woman member, she would almost certainly be from among the migrants.” He explained that the popular council members are supposed to be elected. However,

they do not become members as a result of elections. We have lineages here; and each lineage sends members to the council according to its weight [size]. Each lineage decides who it will send.

About voting, I believe in democracy. If twenty-one people were nominated for the council, there would have to be an election. Of course, anybody can nominate himself if he meets all the requirements, has the right papers, and pays the twenty pound fee. To tell the truth, elections only bring us problems. For us, it is a big problem if a person is nominated by a lineage and does not win. We are relatives. Voting brings disagreements, even quarrels between people. We Awlad 'Ali do not have elections. We are tribes.

As a result of this selection of representatives by the lineages, the members of the popular council are older men, so that "weight will be given to their words and because they will request reasonable things." These men agree among themselves on a head of the council and divide themselves into specialized committees to deal with issues like health care, education, roads, water supply, and the settlement of conflicts. He said,

We are usually very effective in solving problems before they get bigger and bigger. We have a committee to reconcile people who are in disagreement with each other about land boundaries or trade agreements or water rights. Our '*aqila* is also a member of our council. The main problem we have has to do with land boundaries, and sometimes trade agreements.

The executive council, he says, carries out the tasks the popular council sets for it. However, "we sit together, the popular members and the executive members, and make decisions together." A major task for the village council as a whole is setting out a plan for the needs of the village and drawing up a budget. This plan and budget is sent to the governorate council for approval. However, a major problem is that "the budget we receive is very little. With our little budget, we provide what we can." He further explained that,

We sometimes raise money from people here in the village, from merchants and farmers. What we collect, goes into the service fund. We spend the money on things the village needs. Our service fund complements the budget from the governorate. But we have to get approval from the governorate before spending our money, and expenditures from the service fund are audited by the governorate.

This particular village has its own council and also sends a representative chosen by consensus to serve on the Marsa Matruh district council.

Members of the popular council at the level of the governorate are selected to represent the different tribes. At first, they were elected, but one election "exploded with problems" in the 1960s. The governor was worried and, as we were told, asked an Iraqi working for the FAO for his opinion. This man was from an Arab tribe in Iraq. He and an Indian assistant

went around together and counted the tribes. They noted the weight of 'Ali al-Ahmar and 'Ali al-Abiad and Sinaina and so forth. The governorate council needed thirty representatives. So, this Iraqi said seven from 'Ali al-Ahmar and nine from 'Ali al-Abiad, because 'Ali al-Abiad have a lot of *murabtin* with them. Sinaina got three and the Jumi'a at five. The [Western Desert] oases were with us then, as well as Siwa. These got three each. So, that was thirty representatives. We agreed to this division and wrote it down. If fewer representatives are needed, then they are selected on the basis of these proportions. If a tribe has to be left out for some reason during a term, then we have a system of rotation so that each gets its turn. We are now four tribes and Siwa.

A "famous secret agreement" is said to have been made with President Sadat to exempt Bedouin of the northwest coast from elections. As this man put it, "The Awlad 'Ali agreed among themselves and made Sadat agree to it. I don't know the exact content of that agreement, but they have it in the governorate." Selection of popular council members by consensus and on the basis of lineage or tribal affiliation accords well with ancient practice and reinforces tribal and lineage structures in a contemporary setting. This selection process is not limited to local government bodies but also prevails for the "elections" of boards of directors of the agricultural cooperative societies and of the central cooperative society of the Matruh governorate. Outsiders have little hope of breaking into the system, and opposition is stifled. Moreover, an oligarchy of seniors can be said to dominate the popular councils and the boards of directors of cooperatives, as many of the same men serve in both institutions.

Age is a very strong status differential among the Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin. Senior males are accorded great deference by younger men. The latter may sit in *mi'ad* and other fora with the seniors and may speak briefly and quietly about whatever issue is being discussed. However, decisions are made and enunciated by the seniors. For a young man to disagree openly with or challenge a senior would be '*aib*, "shameful"—a serious breach of what is proper. Not surprisingly, older men predominate in the councils and boards, even when many of the better educated youth recognize that many of their elders do not have the modern qualifications to deal effectively with

contemporary issues. Still, they recognize that these old men are adept at solving conflicts between people.

Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin crafted the selection system themselves and are quite pleased with it. However, serious challenges have been raised against some representatives. A problem about the membership of the central cooperative's board of directors was brewing while we were in the field, but the Bedouin hoped to make changes in the board without having to have an election. As one might expect, many Sons of the Nile Valley deeply resent the selection process, which effectively excludes them from participation in local government politics. We raised this issue in a sitting with several men from the Awlad 'Ali and were told,

Of course, we elect representatives to the People's Assembly in Cairo. They represent our interests and discuss important issues. They may bring up the needs of the governorate. Here, in the governorate, our villages are represented in the governorate council. The migrants have a voice in the Marsa Matruh city council. They nominated two people for the People's Assembly in the last elections, but they did not win.

How can someone from Alexandria go and represent us in the national parliament? These migrants may have been here since 1914. They have a vote, but they don't win elections. Also, some of them have never changed their identity cards, and they can vote in their own villages. They have a place reserved for them in the city council. Also, the governor is a migrant. And all the people who work in the governorate are migrants.

This point of view is widely shared by the Awlad 'Ali and other tribespeople. Bujra's expectation that most positions in the government sector would be filled by Bedouin by the mid-1970s has not yet been achieved. Younger and better educated Bedouin often spoke to us of their desire for a governor from the region and for a governorate system firmly based in the region. As one young man said, "The governor is a guest here among us." He and others felt that the governorate represents the state and its interest in the region but not the other way around.

This situation is hardly unique to the Matruh governorate in Egypt's local government system. What is important is that a local government system does exist in the area. People express opinions, and pressures from below are mobilized through the existing system. If it becomes more inclusive, if younger people from both the Bedouin and the Sons of the Nile Valley can assert themselves more effectively, and if greater local resources can be mobilized, the local government system can play a major role in the region's development. Based on our contacts with the younger generation,

we are optimistic that this will happen. However, Bujra was also optimistic about the future role of the region's youth in running its local affairs. And that was thirty years ago.

CHAPTER 5

Change on the Range: From Nomadic Pastoralism to Bedouin Ranching

An elderly ‘aqila, long settled near the sea in Qasr, recalled the days of his youth back around 1930 and said,

I was about fourteen years old, and I remember that we used to move about. Wherever you wanted to graze, you could graze. Wherever you wanted to plow, you could plow. The land was not for the individual but for the *qaba'il* [“tribes”; “clans”].

We followed the rain. Our anchor was Qasr, but we moved wherever there was rain. If there was rain in [Sidi] Barrani, people from here went there. If the rain was here, people from Barrani came here. We would stay as long as we wanted. I used to herd with my brothers and paternal cousins close to the border.

The border between Libya and Egypt was there at that time, when I was fourteen years old. It was made by the English. Before that, no border. Back then, no Egyptian, no Libyan, just the *badiya*.

Our life was simple. We did not even know the [wheat] flour we have today. We had barley; and the women used to grind it. People lived in tents. No permanent houses. No cars.

Whether simple or not, the nomadic agro-pastoralist way of life of the past has vanished. People still plant barley and now many other crops, as we show in the next chapter. The northwest coast continues to have Egypt’s “most important rangelands in terms of productivity” (Ayyad 1992:2). Livestock-raising, sustainably practiced for millennia, still predominates as the region’s most important production system. However, the range is crowded today with people and animals and also loses space to expanding cultivation and other land uses. Access to grazing areas is increasingly privatized, and livestock production now depends on massive amounts of fodder brought in from Lower Egypt. Animals bred and raised in the northwest

coast have long been sold for use in the Nile Valley; but the commercialization of production has expanded greatly, and Bedouin now raise livestock for export to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Anthropologist Thomas J. Barfield (1993:93) characterizes the Anatolian and Iranian plateaus and parts of Central Asia as “the heart of the pastoral world which is based on the raising of sheep, sometimes in herds mixed with goats.” The arid steppes of the Arab world are the homelands of the world’s only camel nomads. They are also home to Arab sheep and goat raisers, among them the Awlad ‘Ali, Jumi‘at, and other Bedouin of the northwest coast. As Barfield (*ibid*:93–94) notes, sheep and goat herders are

the least romantic and most businesslike of the [nomads]. [They] value their sheep as money or goods on the hoof . . . There are no odes to sheep, no praise poems for goats . . . And of all the world’s nomadic pastoralists, the sheep raisers are probably best adapted to cope with the forces of change in the modern world that threaten the very existence of [other nomads].

In this chapter, we describe the old nomadic pastoralist system that prevailed into the 1960s and even lingers on today. We follow with brief comparative perspectives of changes in pastoralist production in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Libya. We then detail the transformation of livestock-raising in the northwest coast into a system Behnke (1980) called “proto-ranching,” but which we define as Bedouin ranching.

The Old Nomadic Pastoralism

Despite conjecture that Arabian Bedouin destroyed ancient agriculture in the northwest coast and converted the region to range land use, pastoral production seems to have prevailed there since ancient times. Strabo records that eastern Libya was famous for its horses and sheep more than two thousand years ago and states that the people there were “like the nomadic Arabians” and carefully attended to the breeding and care of their animals (Jones 1917(8):197). After an exhaustive study of ancient sources, Bates visited the northwest coast in 1910 and concluded that “the present conditions seem to reflect with fair accuracy those which existed anciently” (Bates 1970 [1914]:91).

The old pastoral production system of the Awlad ‘Ali and other Bedouin in the region was a variant of the system common throughout most of the Arab world. These Bedouin specialized in raising either camels or sheep and goats. Some horses were also raised, as were donkeys. Like some other

Bedouin, they cultivated barley as an integral part of their pastoral production system, since the stalks, and sometimes the grain, were used for fodder. Also, the grazing of stubble left in barley fields after the harvest was, and is, an important adjunct to the natural graze and browse of the range.

Range conditions and the amount of barley grown were, and are, dependent on a highly variable pattern of rainfall. We have already noted that average annual rainfall recorded at Marsa Matruh is 138 mm and that most of this meager rain falls along the coast and then tapers off rapidly as "storms" move inland. During most years, rains are highly scattered within the region. A couple of good rains fall at the right times in one area, while another area ten or twenty kilometers away receives almost no rainfall. The region is also subject to periods of extended drought, years of exceptionally good rain, and occasional instances of heavy downpours that bring destruction.

The Awlad 'Ali say that rains in the northwest coast start in the tenth month and continue until the third month, that is from October to March. According to a man in his fifties who raises sheep, cultivates crops, and is also a poet, the rains are classified according to the particular period in which they fall. They almost always come as part of a *nawah*, "storm," which blows in off the Mediterranean Sea. He provided the names of the *nawah*, indicated the duration of time in which they can occur, and said the cycle begins on October 19th. The other beginning dates are calculated by us as shown in Figure 3.

Name	Beginning date	Duration
<i>thoraya</i>	19 October	25 days
<i>asaifa</i>	13 November	15 days
<i>zosah</i>	28 November	25 days
<i>mirzim</i>	23 December	15 days
<i>nijaimat</i>	7 January	25 days
<i>suhail</i>	1 February	"a month"
<i>maris</i>	1 March	"a month"

Figure 3. Storms in the Northwest Coast According to Awlad 'Ali

He says the very best rain for the range and for barley is *thoraya* in late October or early November. A second rain, *suhail* during February, will guarantee excellent conditions. On the other hand, rain during January, *nijaimat*, is not good because it will destroy the barley and is of minor use for the range. Rains during the other periods are welcome but do not lead to ideal conditions. According to this man, "In ten years, there might be three

good years." Most Bedouin with whom we spoke agree with this reckoning, although some expect two good years in five.

Natural vegetation on the range is not only dependent on the rain but also on soil characteristics and land forms, both of which vary from place to place. Good pasture areas are thus scattered about but tend to be located immediately south of the coastal plain in areas that are also good for barley and in the interior where barley cultivation is at best marginal. In the past, some Bedouin households in the northwest coast moved together with their animals from one grazing area to another. However, unlike many other Arab pastoralists operating under different environmental conditions, the Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin in the region often sent their animals to distant pastures under the care of some household members, usually young men, or a contracted shepherd. A case of a more or less ordinary Bedouin household engaged in pastoral production in the 1950s is reconstructed, on the basis of interviews with an educated Bedouin woman, as follows.

This woman's family lived in a winter tent and a summer tent and consisted of fourteen people. These included a senior man and a senior woman, their two married sons with their wives and children, two unmarried sons, and two unmarried daughters. Although tented, the household as a whole did not move over large distances. Short moves were made from time to time to be near a barley field, by an area where vegetables and melons were planted, or where the animals were grazing. These moves all took place within the same small area, in this case near Sidi Barrani. Also living and moving about within this area were the senior man's brothers, his paternal uncles, and other lineage mates.

The household owned two camels and two donkeys used for transportation and plowing. It kept six or seven goats mainly for their milk. A flock of sheep that varied in size from about thirty to a hundred head constituted the main element of the household's pastoral production. Herding of the sheep, with the goats as lead animals, was the everyday responsibility of one of the older sons. During the summer, the animals were herded near the household not far from the coast. They relied mainly on fodder from the household's barley harvest and the stubble left over in the barley field. During winter, the sheep were separated from the household and were taken by the family shepherd and one of his younger brothers to graze on the range in the south in areas that belonged to the tribe.

If it did not rain in this part of the northwest coast, the herd would have to be taken to graze elsewhere. In such situations, the senior man of the household and other seniors from the lineage negotiated with senior men from another clan or tribe in another area to use their range on a reciprocal basis. Rental of range areas was also possible, but uncommon in the past.

During years of drought when all of the range was in poor condition and little or no barley was produced, the animals were taken by the shepherd to Bahaira or Siwa where access to fields was leased.

As noted, the household's few goats provided milk, which was a major element in people's diets. Although not very good milk producers, the sheep supplemented the household's milk supply. Some milk was consumed fresh, but the women and girls processed most of it into *samn*, "ghee," and cheese. A major product of the sheep was their wool. They were sheared on one day in April by the men and older boys in the household and by men and boys from neighboring households organized together as a *raghata*, "reciprocal labor party." The senior woman organized and prepared a major meal, and "there was dancing; it was a happy day."

After the shearing, the wool was collected, sorted, and separated by the women and boys of the household. A portion of the wool was usually kept by the household and used by the women to make kilims and blankets. However, most of the wool was taken to the market and sold by the senior man. Money from the sale of wool provided the household with a major part of its yearly cash income. Additional cash income came from the sale of sheep.

During years of exceptionally good rainfall and thus good grazing, a ewe can have two lambs a year. Normally, the Bedouin expect three lambs every two years. A decision to sell sheep in any particular year was taken by the senior man on the basis of how much barley had been produced and stored, the condition of the range, and whether the household needed cash. Usually, most of the male lambs were sold, along with some of the old or sick ewes. This particular household tried to keep about fifty to sixty ewes, "but sometimes there were more and sometimes less."

In the past, as at present, sheep and other animals were bought and sold in marketplaces at Sidi Barrani, Nijaila, Marsa Matruh, Dab'a, Hammam, and so on. Traders also bought, and buy, in the steppe directly from the producers. This household usually sold to traders in the steppe, but also maintained relations with merchants in Sidi Barrani and Marsa Matruh. These extended credit for items such as tea, sugar, cloth, and household utensils against the future production of the sheep. Moreover, one son from this household worked for wages as a digger of cisterns and thus supplemented the household's cash from the sale of wool and animals.

This case shows an ordinary Bedouin household that produced most but not all of its basic needs and also a surplus of animals for sale in the market. Some households, however, had much larger herds, with three hundred to five hundred ewes. Others had almost no animals and had to work for the wealthy, usually as shepherds. In the past, shepherds were contracted yearly

and were paid one lamb for every ten adult animals they herded, according to a man from the Awlad 'Ali and also to Obermeyer (1968:53). They were paid at the time of weaning the lambs, usually twice a year. As the man from the Awlad 'Ali said, "This was good for the shepherd. With time, he could build up a small herd of his own"—a phenomenon analyzed in detail for the Komachi pastoralists in Iran by Bradbury (1990:71–110).

Camels were bred and raised separately from sheep and goats. Although many households owned a few camels for use in transport and plowing, they were raised in the drier southern parts of the region. The Samalus, a *murabit* tribe, predominated in camel raising and herded their own camels and many that belonged to the Sa'ada. Unlike shepherds who sometimes changed from one herd owner to another every few years or so or became independent, the camel herders seem to have stayed with the same owners from generation to generation. An elderly man from the Samalus said his father was a herder for the same Sa'dawi family he continues to serve. "My father was a camel herder, and I have five camels of my own. Like my father, I look after about seventy camels. I do not know how to look after sheep."

According to an Awlad 'Ali camel raiser, camels never consumed fodder in the past but totally depended on the range. During exceptionally dry years, the camels would be taken by the herder, along with "a couple of men from the family," to grazing areas in Libya. However, "the last time we went to Libya was in 1974. Now we are forbidden to go there." Although the herders consumed some of the milk of the camels, "we leave most of the milk for the offspring." Herders were also provided with flour to make bread and some dates and were also paid a small sum of money or occasionally given a baby camel.

Camel raising is no longer important in the northwest coast. Four or five camel merchants from among the fellahin in Bahaira and one or two from 'Arish in Sinai continue to operate in Matruh; and a yearling (*hiwar*) in the mid-1990s fetches between LE 700 and LE 800. However, Murray (1935:277) noted in the 1930s that the Awlad 'Ali "are great breeders of camels and sheep, and a busy traffic in these goes on weekly in the markets of Hammam, 'Amriya, and the Beheira." He says their camels were strong but not very good for riding and that the Awlad 'Ali mainly used them to transport crops (especially dates) from the oases of Siwa and Bahriya. They also occasionally used them to move their camps; but the camels were "chiefly bred for the markets of the Delta" (*ibid*:113).

Such market-oriented production was not new at the time Murray wrote. He indicates that Awlad 'Ali had been prosperous livestock-raisers before they suffered setbacks during the First World War. They made a quick comeback after the war, and "now own large comfortable tents, are beginning to

build houses and clear out cisterns, and are said to be increasing in numbers.” His Bedouin guides from Sinai and the Eastern Desert felt the Awlad ‘Ali in the 1920s and 1930s had become ‘so “civilized” that they were not “real desert-worthy Bedouin.” Moreover, “they have got into the habit of thinking in money, and they reckon blood-money in cash (£300) and not in camels, as Bedouin should” (*ibid*:277–278).

An enormous demand for camels previously existed in the Nile Valley where they played a major role in the transport of crops in rural areas until two or three decades ago. Large numbers of camels were also required for use by the Egyptian army, and many were slaughtered for meat. Since camels are not bred in the Nile Valley, Egypt was heavily dependent on the import of camels from Arabia, Libya, and Sudan. A few camels were bred in Sinai and the Eastern Desert, but the Nile Valley’s most significant Egyptian source of camels was the northwest coast.

Matruh also provided Nile Valley Egypt with a third or more of the mutton consumed there until the 1960s, with the remainder raised in the delta or imported from Libya and Sudan (Mohsen 1975:14). Finally, most of the wool shorn from the region’s sheep eventually reached textile factories in the Nile Valley, where it was woven into carpets. The old pastoralist production, in part, was a subsistence-oriented system organized by kindreds. However, long before it was transformed in the 1960s and the decades that have followed, the old system was firmly linked by trade and other market relations to the Nile Valley. It was also characterized by the existence of a few relatively large-scale livestock owners, many small-scale pastoralists, and some with no or almost no animals of their own.

The New Bedouin Ranching

We have mentioned severe droughts in the 1950s and early 1960s that seriously affected Bedouin in different parts of the Arab world. Arab states mainly responded to these crises by sedentarization projects and by the distribution of subsidized fodder. More or less coincidental with the droughts were numerous other changes that had impacts on range-based livestock-raising. These include an increased flow of money within the region as a result of the sale of oil, rapid urbanization and population growth, increased demand for meat, and widespread use of motor vehicles.

When rain again fell on the parched steppes and the droughts eased, the old tribally organized and controlled pastoralist system was not fully reestablished on Arab ranges. A more individually organized and commercially oriented system emerged. We consider this new system to be a form of

ranching. As in anthropologist Arnold Strickon's (1965:230) definition of ranching, the new system is a "pattern of land use . . . based on the grazing of livestock . . . for sale in a money market." The second part of his definition that mentions "control over large units of land, extensive use of that land, and extensive use of labour on the land" applies to the Euro-American ranching complex but not to the situation on Arab ranges. Thus, we speak of *Bedouin* ranching: commercial production by moderately small units on open, unfenced, and nondemarcated ranges legally owned by the state and with relatively intensive labor inputs per animal unit.

Comparative Perspectives: Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Libya

Before describing the transformation of livestock-raising in the northwest coast, we briefly sketch changes in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Libya. Each of these areas has its specificities, as does the northwest coast; however, the presentation confirms that changes in the northwest coast are not unique to that region but are part of a much broader process of change.

Lewis provides a detailed description and analysis of the transformation of the Syrian steppe since 1800, and the following presentation is taken directly from his perceptive documentation of change there since the late 1950s (Lewis 1987:170–192). As Lewis puts it, 1958 to 1961 were the years of union between Syria and Egypt and also the "years of drought." Syria lost half of its sheep and about 85 percent of its camels. Wheat production fell by almost 60 percent and that of barley by more than 75 percent. Livestock could not be grazed on the barren range, and Bedouin were forced to take flocks to western Syria and Lebanon in hopes of renting access to fields for pasturage. Unable to pay the rent demanded by landowners, most had to sell their animals at "rock-bottom prices." Villages in the Syrian steppe were largely deserted. Some men accompanied flocks to other areas, but many sought whatever work they could find in the cities of Syria or Lebanon. Women sat out the drought alone in their tents or in the almost abandoned villages or took refuge with relatives in other places.

After the end of the drought, in 1962, most of the farming population returned and replanted their land, most of which was marginal and "hardly worth cultivating;" but the land was their only resource and farming it their only means of survival. Many of the poorer pastoralists who had found work in cities remained there, while others worked as sharecroppers or laborers in the countryside or became shepherds of animals belonging to others. Some older men who were relatively well off and owned land or had sons to support them decided to settle and sold off whatever camels they still had.

Reduced flocks of sheep they had managed to save were turned over to contracted shepherds.

Some of the Syrian pastoralists decided to return to the range and sought financing from urban merchants to replace their flocks. Merchants who agreed to take the risk usually demanded full repayment of the cost of replacing a flock within three to five years through the sale of male lambs, sheep, milk, milk products, and wool. After this, the Bedouin gained a half interest in the flock and could take half of its future growth and products. The merchant recouped his original capital outlay and still owned a half interest in the flock. Meanwhile the Syrian state supported the drilling of modern water wells and the renovation of ancient cisterns in the steppe. The state also sponsored the introduction of cooperative societies, subsidized the provision of fodder, and declared a ban on the plowing of especially arid areas in an attempt to conserve the natural range.

The use of supplementary fodder increasingly replaced a primary reliance on the nomadic use of natural ranges. Tribally organized and coordinated migrations ceased. Most family members of livestock owners remained in settlements while a couple of sons or hired shepherds took flocks seasonally to graze on the open range. With old tribal control mechanisms no longer in place, seasonal migrations became individualistic endeavors to make maximum use of the "free" range whenever possible.

Barley fields began to be grazed directly instead of first harvesting the crop and using the stalks for fodder. Tractors, readily and cheaply available through the cooperatives, made plowing easier, and more marginal land was cultivated in hopes that a rain would result in at least some barley for grazing. Meanwhile motor vehicles increased in numbers on the Syrian steppe, and trucks, especially pick-ups, became popular. The vehicles transported "people and sheep" on migration and to and from markets. They also increasingly brought water and fodder to the flocks and thus lessened the old dependence on tribal wells and the natural range.

With relatively good seasons in the middle and late 1960s and generally rising prices for sheep, the number of sheep in Syria doubled by the end of the decade to about six million. The Bedouin generally managed to bring closure to their partnership contracts with the urban merchants, and most came to own the flocks they herded. Sheep raising was fully commercialized and also expanded as demand for mutton mushroomed in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf during the oil boom that started there in the mid-1970s. As more of the Syrian steppe was legally or illegally plowed and subjected to massive vehicular traffic, its fine topsoil began to blow away. More sheep were being raised for new markets, but on less land. In the words of Lewis,

Both cultivated and uncultivated areas are now suffering from abusive exploitation as too many people and too many sheep try to extract a living from an area with insufficient natural resources to support them (*ibid*:192).

During the 1950s Saudi Arabia experienced expansion of the oil industry, new urbanization and national development programs, and years of abnormally low rainfall in much of the northern part of the country. Some Bedouin, especially those with few animals, were forced to abandon the range. Many others who were able to salvage some of their animals or who operated in areas not affected by the drought opted to supplement their livelihood based on livestock-raising by finding additional sources of income. Bedouin men signed on as waged laborers with the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO), worked on the construction of the railroad from Riyadh to Dammam and of a major pipeline across northern Arabia, toiled with the geological survey in the Empty Quarter and Eastern Province, engaged in small-scale trade and transport in the desert and in cities, and/or joined the National Guard.

When the rains returned—as they always do—Bedouin began to rebuild sheep herds and some goat herds, especially in the north. Since pick-up trucks replaced camels in desert transportation and mechanical pumps rather than camel power raised water from most wells, few of the northern Bedouin invested in replacing camel herds. Even camel nomads who had previously disdained sheep and goat herders as exceedingly low-status people switched to raising sheep (and, sometimes, goats). Unlike the case in Syria, urban merchants played no role in the rebuilding of herds, and the state never introduced cooperative societies. The Saudi Arabian Bedouin individually financed the rebuilding of their own herds with savings accumulated from income earned outside the pastoral sphere. Later on, in the 1970s, an oil-revenue-rich Saudi Arabian state financially supported the expansion of herds through cash subsidies paid directly to the Bedouin for each animal they claimed to own.

At first, the new sheep and goat herds were looked after and managed by members of a tented household. But, increasingly, hired shepherds were brought in from other countries, especially Syria. The old tribal control of range areas was relaxed, as the state drilled public wells in the steppes, abolished the ancient *hima*, “[range] preserve,” system, and declared undeveloped desert lands state property open to all. More and more, the sheep and goats were raised for sale in the country’s growing urban markets. Meanwhile many young Bedouin men sought modern education; and schooling plus trade, other employment, and service in the National Guard pulled them away from the camps. Thus Saudi Arabian sheep and goat herd-

ing camps in the late 1960s were usually composed of women, children, old men, and a hired shepherd.

As the oil-revenue-based economy boomed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many Bedouin with herds sold some livestock but met most of their cash needs from outside sources of income, including cash subsidies and welfare payments. Herds increased in size. With new modern communications, news of a rain a thousand kilometers away was quickly received. Herds were, and are, loaded on large trucks and quickly transported to the distant ranges—with potentially negative impacts on the natural vegetation because of too early and too intensive grazing. Meanwhile, urban demand for mutton remained high, and goat meat became popular among some. Without significant livestock sales from local Bedouin, urban merchants increasingly imported live animals from abroad—from Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Australia, New Zealand, and eventually, the Egyptian northwest coast.

The imported animals have usually been cheaper than the locally-grown variety, but many urban consumers say meat from the local breeds is tastier. Eventually, the state abandoned its cash subsidy on the Bedouin's livestock and introduced subsidized fodder instead. Fattening programs, modern abattoirs, and better marketing facilities now draw greater proportions of the animals out of the steppes and into the homes of consumers as meat. The grandfathers of today's livestock owners were tribally organized nomadic pastoralists. The owners of today call themselves Bedouin and are proud of their tribal descent. Some are settled in small communities that dot the vast ranges and remain closely involved with their herds. However, many live in towns and cities and actively engage in other occupations. Largely absentee ranchers, they visit the herds from time to time and manage the provision of fodder and sales. The everyday herding of almost all the livestock on the Saudi Arabian range is left to hired shepherds, usually expatriates—some of whom speak little or no Arabic (see Cole 1973, 1975:136–163, 1980, 1981, 1982; Fernea 1987; Cole and Altorki 1993).

Eastern Libya shares many aspects of ecology, culture, and history with the Egyptian northwest coast. As an oil producing country, Libya also shares important dimensions of recent socioeconomic change with Saudi Arabia. Eastern Libya's nomadic agro-pastoralists did not suffer a near deadly blow from a drought; but Behnke (1980) shows that many Bedouin men left their family herds and barley and wheat fields and signed on as waged laborers in Libya's expanding oil sector in the 1960s. Villages, towns, and cities began to grow as many left the range-dominated countryside, settled on their own or in state-sponsored housing projects, and took on new occupations in government service or trade. With more and more disposable cash income, the demand for meat (and other food) went up. This increased demand was

partly met through imports, including large numbers of sheep from the northwest coast. However, part of the new demand for meat was supplied from a changed Libyan production system that Behnke identified as "an indigenous and peculiarly Libyan form of market- and money-oriented ranching" (*ibid*:2).

According to Behnke, many of those who settled, especially Bedouin with few animals, found it advantageous to liquidate their herds and sold them. By contrast, a few kept their animals but increased herd sizes from about sixty to between three hundred and four hundred head of sheep and goats, the maximum number a single herder can control on the open ranges. The owners of such herds were often government employees who "commuted between job, herd, and household on a daily or weekly basis" (*ibid*:87). The sheep and goats were taken care of by hired Libyan shepherds. However, following Libya's First of September Revolution in 1969 and consequent friendly relations between Egypt and Libya, Egyptian shepherds—many from the Awlad 'Ali—accepted employment at low wages from these herd owners and "quickly drove the more expensive Libyan shepherds off the market" (*ibid*:90).

Herding thus became market-oriented, with meat rather than milk becoming the product for sale. The owners were sedentary, bought their own consumer items, used hired labor, had large herds, and sold the produce of those herds (lambs and kids). Although absentee, the owners managed the herding operation—making decisions about where the animals should graze or browse, which animals should be culled for sale, and when and where they should be sold. The old pastoralism had vanished; in its stead was "proto-ranching," to use Behnke's term. This transformation had taken place without technical advice or any direct outside financial aid. Behnke stresses that "individual Bedouin families accumulated the capital which funded, and made the management decisions which guided, the development of this new form of animal husbandry" (*ibid*:88). The success of this change was in part due to the form of capital they owned and managed. Their capital was animals and, being naturally reproductive, under "normal" circumstances sheep and goats will increase—doubling or even tripling in a year.

At the time of his research (1973–74), no one had fenced off large territories as ranches or developed multiple herds. Their operations thus remained moderate in scale, but they were fully commercialized. Fewer people were engaged in livestock production, but the herds were larger. Since the total number of herds was less than in the past, Behnke suggests that overstocking with consequent overgrazing and deterioration of range areas was not a problem at that time. He further recognizes that "production of highly priced animal products depends in large measure upon a sufficient

supply of fodder and feed grain" (*ibid*:47) and documents an integral link between eastern Libyan crop and livestock production in the past. He does not, however, indicate changes that may have taken place in the crop production aspect of this system or whether fodder produced elsewhere was introduced.

Changing the Range

A major feature of the change described above was the breakdown of the old system of controls that had organized access to and use of range areas by pastoralists. Range management had been strongly embedded in the decentralized, kin-based segmentary tribal organization of Bedouin pastoralists and had legal foundations in their '*urf*. Moreover, their pattern of range use was in accord with the *Shari'a*. However, state declarations that all undeveloped desert land was state property, the development of new public water resources in the steppes, and the ubiquitous use of motor vehicles combined to undermine the old lineage, clan, and tribal control of the arid ranges.

One of the Hadith, or Traditions that form part of the *Shari'a*, says, "Man holds three things in common, water, vegetation, and fire." Range land outside the boundaries of built up communities and agricultural fields constitutes a part of the land designated as *mawat* in the *Shari'a* and is not privately owned. Such land can be appropriated as private property ("*mulk*") through development or vivification as part of the process of *ibya'*, "to endow with life," based on the Hadith which says, "He who endows barren land with life, it becomes his" (Wilkinson 1983:303–304; Altorki and Cole 1989:35).

The *Shari'a* principle of development or vivification can be extended to water if one has to invest effort or energy to make it available, as in digging a well or a cistern. Thus "the water supply in the desert can be owned (even if belonging to a group rather than an individual) because usually it has to be developed by man" (Wilkinson 1983:306–307). The natural range vegetation is a gift of Allah, and everybody is free to make use of it. However, pastoralist use of this vegetation requires access to water. Therefore, an individual or group wishing to graze his/their livestock on the range must have wells or cisterns there, have the capacity to transport water to the animals, or obtain permission to use water belonging to another individual or group. Lineage, clan, or tribal territories were defined by ownership of water resources and not by the ownership of land or the range itself.⁷

The Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin in the northwest coast do not speak of *Shari'a* principles when talking about their use of the *mara'i*, "range," but say that land and water rights derive from '*urf*. The elderly '*aqila* quoted above said that land for grazing and for (shifting) barley cultivation was not

for the individual but for the *qaba'il*—tribes or clans. Animals were owned by individuals. Their purchase and sale were sole prerogatives of their owner. Their owner could take them to graze anywhere within the territories of his kindred. However, access to grazing in territories of other kindreds involved consultation with seniors from within his own lineage and their negotiation with seniors from other lineages, clans, or tribes. Tribal etiquette held that a person passing by could drink freely from a cistern or well belonging to another individual or group. A whole flock or herd passing by could also be watered once without seeking permission. Regular use of the well or cistern and, by implication, grazing within the nearby area required the permission and, depending on the wishes of the owner, a payment.

Development of water resources in the northwest coast is presented in the following chapter. Suffice it to note here that access to water in the steppe is no longer a limiting factor that curtails people's access to the range. According to a livestock-raiser from the Awlad 'Ali who has settled on the steppe,

The government gave us wells, cisterns. We have a lot of water. Water is not a problem any more. The government gave us these cisterns so that we don't go away from here. It is very good, very good; but the water is from Allah.

Another livestock-raiser indicated his father had only had three ancient cisterns. This man now has seventeen additional cisterns spread over a large area within the range. He obtained them as an individual under the auspices of the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*. Moreover, he can now buy water stored in new cisterns belonging to other individuals and can also buy water and have it transported by tanker for storage in his own cisterns in case of drought. Although not intended, state programs to develop the supply of water in the steppe undermined group control of the water supply in favor of its privatization in the case of cisterns or free access by all in the case of public wells.

This change contributed to opening up large parts of the range to livestock-raisers as individuals. Meanwhile some individuals now assert private possession of range areas. More remote areas in the interior of the northwest coast are now claimed by individuals who demand a fee of about one Egyptian pound per head per month for access to the natural range for seasonal grazing in winter or spring. What is probably more usual are individual rentals of access to barley fields and surrounding natural graze and browse during summer and early fall. According to one livestock-raiser, individuals in an area that received good rainfall will negotiate in early spring for summer use of their grazing lands by individuals from areas that received little or no rain. "We will have to pay up to four pounds per head [per

month] to graze there. This will be cheaper than buying fodder." He further explained that,

When I send my sheep to [another area] because it has rained there, I put them with a shepherd from there. He looks after the sheep on his own land. It is not his land but his *qabila's* land. He should never take on more animals than his land can sustain. I always go to the same man. Sometimes, he comes to me and tells me he has had good rain. I give him money for the '*ushb*' ["grass"] and the water.

However, another Awlad 'Ali livestock-raiser argued that,

It is not good to send your sheep to someone else's land and let him herd them. First, it costs five pounds per sheep per month. Secondly, he takes on too many sheep. Crowded! It becomes very crowded. He may not put your sheep on the best grazing land. He may lose the sheep, let them stray off. If we don't have rain, I use fodder. Even if it has rained, we use fodder.

The comment that a shepherd contracts to graze sheep on "his own land" that is "not his land but his *qabila's* land" reflects an ambiguity that prevails in land tenure. The old tribal system continues. As one man said, "I am from Bait 'Umar [a minimal lineage] and we graze wherever Bait 'Umar has rights to graze. I do not pay for this grazing because it belongs to Bait 'Umar." Laws enacted in 1958 and 1964, however, reassert the state's ownership of nondemarcated desert land as *malkiya khassa lil dawla*, "private property of the state;" "state property." Although the 1964 law recognizes a right to private ownership of desert land planted with permanent trees before 1958, it makes no provision for ownership of pastures, barley fields, or other cultivated areas (Mohsen 1975:10; Arab Republic of Egypt 1990). Meanwhile informal privatization is underway on land claimed by kindreds and legally owned by the state.

A fundamental pattern of range use formerly involved removal of livestock from the northwest coast during periods of low rainfall, a phenomenon which protected against overgrazing during crisis periods. The principal destination was Nile Valley farms in Bahaira, but people also took animals to Siwa and into Libya. From the late 1920s sheep were transported to Bahaira by train. The transport cost in about 1962 was 12 piasters per head when a sheep sold for LE 10 (roughly equivalent to \$28 back then). "But the government will not accept sheep for shipment unless they are accompanied by a shepherd" (Obermeyer 1968:54). The shepherd was usually the owner or an adult son.

In Bahaira, the owner or his son negotiated with landowners or farm managers to graze animals on stubble left in fields or to feed them on crop residue. Before the Agrarian Reform laws of 1952, 1961, and 1969, much of the land was held in large estates, and the Awlad 'Ali say it was relatively easy to gain access to the estates. Their owners or managers appreciated the benefits of the manure left by the animals and did not charge very high fees. The animals and their herders sometimes stayed for nine months or even longer. However, redistribution of the estates into small holdings complicated access to fields because one had to negotiate with many different owners. Moreover, increased population density in Bahaira and recent urbanization in 'Amriya and along the desert highway have made Bahaira an unattractive alternative. Bedouin from the Wadi Natrun area still take herds to Bahaira; but people in the northwest coast say they have not gone there since the 1970s.

As already mentioned, strict closure of the border with Libya in the mid-1970s removed Libyan pastures as an alternative grazing area. Siwa has provided an alternative and, as discussed in the next chapter, many of the Awlad 'Ali have long maintained partnership ties with Siwan farmers. Siwa has become more attractive for some since the completion of a paved highway between Marsa Matruh and the oasis by the early 1980s. However, as one livestock-raiser said, "People go to Siwa in April and return in September. I took my livestock there in '80 and '85. I don't like to go to Siwa. They have too many mosquitos." Another man said, "Some people go to Siwa but not us. It costs too much there."

The loss of Bahaira and Libya as viable alternatives has not been compensated by Siwa. However, they have been compensated, in part, by the use of fodder produced in the Nile Valley. According to one livestock-raiser, "Since we have had the fodder, we don't go to Bahaira anymore." Fodder from outside the region was introduced as part of the first WFP project in 1963. About 1,300 metric tons of barley and 870 tons of cotton seed cake were distributed for almost 145,000 sheep in the "Matruh sector" (Obermeyer 1968:51). This fodder was distributed through the new agricultural cooperative societies to their members for token payments. The fodder was intended to provide supplementary feed for use during the dry summer months. However, because of inadequate transport facilities, most of the fodder did not arrive until good rains had come and the range was green. Nonetheless, beneficiaries took their shares and sold the fodder in the black market in Alexandria or smuggled it into Libya (Abou-Zeid nd:28).

For thirty years distribution of subsidized fodder was a main activity of the agricultural cooperative societies coordinated through the central cooperative in Marsa Matruh in liaison with the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*. Its use became

an integral part of livestock-raising and contributed to the development of livestock-fattening among some raisers and by traders. The availability of fodder protects against years of low rainfall and drought and contributes to livestock being in good condition for sale. Its availability also allows for more animals to be kept in the region and lessens the need to take them to distant seasonal pastures—with potential overly intensive grazing of nearby areas within the livestock-raiser's home territory by the now more stationary herds.

Fodder also fueled the commercialization of livestock raising. As one Awlad 'Ali livestock-raiser said, "We now sell sheep, it seems, to buy fodder." Another man said, "We never bought fodder in the past. These days, we spend money on the sheep. Today, even the camel eats fodder. Very expensive!"

A major complaint raised by livestock-raisers and herders surveyed in 1990 was that the quantity of fodder available through the cooperatives was insufficient, especially during dry years when more fodder was required. They would have to resort to merchants who sold at higher, free market prices. Some also complained that the type of fodder available was not appropriate for sheep.

A university-educated son of a large-scale Awlad 'Ali livestock-raiser commented that "peasants run the government in Egypt;" therefore, the only fodder locally available was good for water buffaloes and cows but not for sheep. By contrast, "Saudi Arabia and Libya have Bedouin governments" and, as a result, provide fodder that is excellent for sheep. Be that as it may, the Egyptian state no longer provides subsidized fodder. As part of a structural adjustment program agreed with the IMF, subsidies on agricultural inputs, including fodder, were lifted at the beginning of the 1990s. Fodder is now procured through the market, as described in the next section.

Change on the range since the early 1960s has also involved monetary compensation for shepherds. Unpaid family labor continues to exist, as one or two of the herd owner's sons work as shepherds. In one case, an owner said, "One of my sons is a driver; the other works with the animals. Most of my younger sons help out in the herding." Another Awlad 'Ali man said, "My livestock are with a shepherd. He is my son." However, hired shepherds have become common. Formerly paid in kind, shepherds in the mid-1990s are paid wages up to about LE 400 per month. According to one livestock-raiser,

The shepherd takes his salary, and we send him some food. He stays with the herd all the time, takes them to graze, and keeps them out of any agricultural land that may be in the way. He sleeps next to them at night, with the lead

animal tied to his wrist by a rope. This is to ensure that the herd will not get up and wander off at night while he is asleep.

The shearing of sheep, formerly done by the flock owner and his sons or as a *raghata* with neighbors, is often done now by "specialists" from among the fellahin for about 60 piasters per sheep. However, as one man said, "Sometimes we shear the sheep and sometimes we hire others." The wool is a less valuable commodity for raisers in the mid-1990s than in the past. It is now marketed through the central cooperative which has a monopsony on wool and pays relatively low prices for it. The cooperative sends the wool to a public sector company in Damanhur which converts it into carpets for sale at relatively high prices in the Nile Valley. As in the past, the livestock-raisers usually keep some of the wool, and "the women make kilims out of it. Sometimes they make blankets, too."

Another major change is that livestock-raisers no longer depend on their livestock and their own barley production for their basic subsistence. Most of the Bedouin living on the steppe purchase most of their food. They do not buy milk, since "we have our goats for milk." Many Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin households now have chickens and eggs; but men told us that women manage the chickens, and "we don't know about it." However, according to one man living out on the range, "I buy kerosene, beans, flour, rice, vegetables, sugar, and tea from the market." Another Awlad 'Ali man in the same area told us that he spends LE 800 a month for a household with fifteen people: "I spend on food and drink, the doctor. Transportation. We buy meat. Before, we used to make bread from our own barley. Now the children are spoiled; they want white bread." The Bedouin raises sheep today to sell them in order "to feed his family and meet his incidental expenses."

Livestock-Fattening and Marketing

The Bedouin with whom we spoke invariably referred to their livestock as *ras mal*, "capital." Many further pointed out that investing in sheep and goats is better than investing savings in a bank. Although a greater risk is involved, they say the rate of return on the animals is likely to be higher than interest earned from the bank. Moreover, interest is *haram*, "forbidden," by Islam, while money earned as a result of the natural increase of one's sheep and goats is *halal*, "righteous." Animals also have value for ritual purposes. *Debiha*, "[sacrificial] slaughter," is *de rigueur* for births, circumcisions, weddings, funerals, the return of pilgrims from the Haj, and the settlement of disputes. *Debiha* also accompanies the Muslim feasts of '*Id al-Fitr* and '*Id al-'Adha* and may be required as hospitality for guests. Possession of live-

stock also figures as an element of identity among the Bedouin. A young Awlad 'Ali man told us that he believes his family's sheep are more a liability than an asset; however, his elderly father said, "My father and our grandfathers had sheep; we have to keep them."

The continued social significance of livestock is important, but livestock as capital predominates in local discourse about the region's economy. Bedouin involved with livestock today characterize themselves as livestock-raisers, livestock-fatteners, or livestock-traders. They speak of the fodder merchant and mention the opening and closing of the *tasdir*, "export," to markets in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. One man spoke of his animals as being a bank that provides capital for him to develop new agriculture on the steppe.

An Awlad 'Ali livestock-trader who also engages in the fattening of sheep described the livestock-raiser as one who just "leaves the animals to look for their food in the desert." This is a gross oversimplification. A successful livestock-raiser today has to be a good manager. He has to arrange access to grazing land, provide water, organize shepherding, procure fodder, obtain veterinarian care and medicine, and make decisions about when and how many animals to sell. Many livestock-raisers also engage in fattening animals for sale. As one livestock-raiser said, "We sell the male lambs and start fattening them a month before we plan to sell them." Another man said, "I raise sheep and sell the lambs, but I also buy sheep to fatten them in hopes of making a profit."

The Bedouin livestock-raiser has to assess his income from livestock over a period of several years, because bad years are offset by good years. Bad years are when it is dry and one has to buy large amounts of fodder. Fewer lambs and kids will probably be born and their survival rate will be low. Good years with rain bring more offspring, better survival rates, and little or no expenditure on fodder. According to one livestock-raiser,

Sheep raising is only profitable during years of good rain and good pasture. The sheep bring in excellent income. Much better than agriculture. The other years are not all bad. But in a bad year like this year, without rain, we have no income from the sheep. At best, we just manage to break even. In a bad year, we buy on credit. The fodder merchant will wait for up to about two months, and then he is paid when we sell some sheep. He is a good man. He does not take interest.

A university-educated young man from the Awlad 'Ali is not himself involved with livestock, although his father and paternal uncles own large herds. He and his cousins, also well-educated, concur that livestock-raising

is profitable, but one has "to look at expenditures and incomes over a period of three, four, or five years." This young man provided the following calculations:

A hundred ewes give birth to 150 lambs in a year. Let's take away thirty which die at birth or later on or that are used for *debiha*. This leaves 120 lambs, or about sixty males. The livestock raiser can sell these sixty males for about 200 pounds each for a total of about twelve thousand pounds. He will have spent about six or seven thousand pounds on them. The rest is profit, four or five thousand pounds. This calculation is for an average year.

In a good year, he may lose only ten lambs and thus have seventy males to sell. These will bring in fourteen thousand pounds. If the export is open, he can sell them for three hundred pounds each and receive twenty-one thousand pounds. He will not have spent much for fodder because it rained. He will be happy. He might get married. Build a house. Construct a cistern. Pay off his debts from previous years.

A man with a household of fifteen people will spend between five and seven hundred pounds a month for living expenses. That comes to between seven thousand and eight thousand four hundred pounds a year. We said that a hundred sheep during an average year can bring a profit of between four and five thousand pounds. He will be in debt, unless he has other income—from agriculture, his sons working for wages. During a good year, a hundred sheep may bring a profit of, say, fifteen thousand pounds. He will have a surplus and can pay back debts.

A third possibility is for the livestock-raiser with a hundred ewes to sell off 150 animals. These would include some of the old ewes which are replaced by some of the lambs. He will do this when he has debts and needs the capital.

A livestock-raiser does not get rich unless he has a very large number of sheep. Most have a hundred to 150 sheep. A few have eight hundred or a thousand head. A couple of men have even more, but these are merchants.

Some Bedouin concentrate their activities on buying sheep and fattening them for resale. One man explained that he buys sheep and puts them in a *ziriba*, "pen." "They eat good fodder, drink good water, and have good shade." He does this for forty days and then takes them to the market, where "we expect they will fetch a good price." Prices in the market "go up and down;" but he times the sales to coincide with periods when prices are expected to be high, such as '*Id al-'Adha* and when the export is open. According to a young livestock-trader from the Awlad 'Ali, "big dealers,

who buy a lot of sheep, say, a thousand head, buy cheap, put them in feed lots, and wait until they can sell at high prices in 'Amriya or for export."

This young Awlad 'Ali trader, about thirty years old, says he has always had a passion for trading—that when he was a student in secondary school, he would run from the school all the way to the livestock market in Marsa Matruh to see what was happening. According to him, and others concur, "The marketing of animals is complex in Egypt." As he explained,

The government sets controls on the price of meat. Butchers from Cairo and Alexandria and other places all come to buy sheep from the merchants in 'Amriya. Those merchants buy from us in Marsa Matruh. Although prices are fixed for the sale of meat, supply and demand sets the price for the sale of live animals. The government also controls the export of live animals. This market brings higher prices than that for the sale of animals for meat in Egypt. But the government limits the number of animals that can be exported. Prices are also influenced by seasonal demands, the '*Id al-'Adha* for example.

He says that, if he were not interested in his own income, he would advise livestock-raisers to sell to traders when they go out to herds on the range. The price will be lower, but the buyer pays for transport. Moreover, "the merchants in the *suq* set the prices." The owner will also have to pay an entrance fee to the *suq* and may have to pay for putting the animals up overnight, if they do not sell. Concerning merchants setting the prices, he said,

All the merchants in the *suq* are from the Awlad 'Ali. Of course, we compete with each other in the prices we offer. Business is business. But if someone agrees to sell at a lower price than the market price, we do not interfere. We traders respect each other's interests.

Unless the livestock-raiser is aware of market prices, he may lose by selling outside the market. An example given by this trader is that he buys from the livestock-raiser for LE 150 a head. He may hold the sheep, feed them, and wait for the market to go up, which is legitimate "because I have invested and waited for the market to change." However, "I sometimes find the buyer waiting for me; I sell for maybe 200 or 250 pounds." As a merchant, he says he divides his losses and gains between high prices and low prices. "I do not lose; somewhere in the middle I gain." He is not rich, a small-scale trader, and many others are like him.

The northwest coast also has several who manage relatively large-scale export operations for sheep and, to a lesser extent, goats, mainly to Saudi Arabia but also to Kuwait. Two of these men are from the Jumi‘at and have formed companies that deal with this aspect of their business interests. According to the small-scale trader from Awlad ‘Ali, “Those who export buy in huge quantities and this improves the prices; but the person who exports tells you how much he is willing to pay.” Another trader from the Awlad ‘Ali engages in export on a moderate basis and explained aspects of the system, as follows:

When we export sheep, they usually go from here to Nuwaiba [in Sinai] by truck. There they cross over to ‘Aqaba by ferry and then continue on to Jidda or Kuwait by truck. This long travel is very strenuous, and the animals suffer. Of course, before going they have to be checked for all kinds of diseases, have blood tests, all kinds of inspections.

Sometimes we ship the animals by airplane, especially goats. It’s costly, about 150 pounds per head. Last year, I sent four hundred goats to Kuwait by plane. We shipped them in two large containers, each with two layers holding fifty head. They were in Kuwait after two hours from Alexandria. The buyers in Kuwait pay for the transport. I just send the livestock from here.

A pastoralist living in a tent in 1960 might have sent his sheep by train to Bahaira. However, he would never have dreamed that goats would be shipped from the northwest coast to the Arabian peninsula by airplane. He also would not have imagined that fodder from the Nile Valley would become very important for the region’s livestock. Introduced by the state and mainly distributed through the agricultural cooperative societies for thirty years, the supply and distribution of fodder since the early 1990s is in the hands of the private sector. Even the cooperatives seem to have been somewhat privatized. According to a merchant from the Awlad ‘Ali, the cooperatives lifted their long-standing subsidy and began to sell on credit. However, the first year they demanded payment at a time when export was closed. People could not generate the money to pay and were forced to sell animals at about half price in order to meet their debts. According to a live-stock-raiser,

We don’t take anything from the cooperative anymore. Things have changed. They sell to you on credit and take a check from you which you have to pay in six months. If you don’t pay, they make you. However, the merchant can

always wait a little. We buy all the fodder now from the market, from a merchant.

A merchant from the Awlad 'Ali is a partner with several of his brothers in a small business that sells fodder in Marsa Matruh, where he says about fifty others are engaged in the same activity. He reckons that the northwest coast from Hammam to Sallum consumes about three hundred metric tons of fodder daily for four to five months out of the year, depending on the rainfall. The demand for fodder also goes up when the state opens the export market, as exporters rush to fatten the animals. He says good qualities of fodder are now available, including *ghala*, "bran," from wheat. He also sells barley, wheat straw, cottonseed cake, and dried alfalfa. Most of this is grown in the governorates of Bahaira and Kafr ash-Shaikh, but he deals with factories in Alexandria, Kafr az-Zayyat, Nubariya, 'Amriya, and Mansura. Some are private factories that "sprang up with the decline of the cooperatives." Others are public sector factories which have been privatized. He says he used to be able to take fodder from the public sector companies on credit,

but they stopped this with privatization. The new companies require a large down payment to guarantee your order. If you cannot take the order on time, they store it and charge you. We are having a hard time. The desert consumes a lot of fodder, but we are all small merchants. The factories can always do without us. They sell to the big guys in the Nile Valley who place huge orders and can make the down payment without problems.

The main problem with fodder is financing. When I buy, no one waits for me. I have to pay up at once. But I sell on credit. I can't refuse to give credit. Where will I sell if I do that? This is a risky business. We go to somebody to get our money back and find he is in trouble. What can we do? Also, when there is plenty of green, nobody buys my fodder. In those years that are good for the livestock-raiser and bad for me, I go to people who owe me and take sheep from them instead of money. If the sheep live, I have gained. If they die . . . If not, Allah will compensate.

Concluding Remarks

Around 1960 the northwest coast had fewer than three hundred thousand sheep and less than a hundred thousand goats. Based on estimates by Ayyad (1992:29), the area today, thirty-five years later, probably has about 1.3 million sheep and four hundred thousand goats. The price of a sheep has increased from about LE 9 (about \$28) to between LE 200 and LE 300 (rough-

ly, \$60 to \$90). Goats are cheaper but have also increased in monetary value. Meanwhile the number of people living on the steppe has more than doubled during roughly the same period. Available statistics are neither precise nor highly reliable, but they confirm the qualitative observation that change on the range has been rapid and of significant magnitude.

During this period, some Bedouin left the steppe and settled in Marsa Matruh or other urban places. Some who remained in the steppe shifted most of their economic activities to crop production or trade. Most continue to own herds, but many households have additional sources of income from crops, waged labor and salaried employment, and trade. They now buy most of their daily consumption needs from the market. Herd sizes have increased for most owners. Whereas the majority kept sixty or seventy head of sheep, most have herds of between one hundred and two hundred head today. Herds of about four hundred to five hundred head are not uncommon, and a few have eight hundred to a thousand head.

Are there too many animals and too many people on the range today? Maybe. Comprehensive and systematic monitoring of range conditions has not yet been done. Qualitative assessments suggest that land degradation looms as a serious threat but is not yet far advanced. The main culprit is not so much livestock grazing on the range but rather inappropriate plowing of parts of the range for barley by the Bedouin and reportedly for wheat by the Egyptian military in the western part of the region. An assessment of the northwest coast's capacity to hold increased numbers of livestock must consider the new role played by fodder as a supplement to the natural graze and browse.

The roles of the state and of development programs have been indirect in this process of change. The Bedouin have adjusted their production to meet changing markets and to take advantage of new water resources, the availability of fodder, and improved transport facilities. Like many farmers in the Nile Valley, most of the Bedouin run small- to medium-scale operations. Credit and financing is largely limited to the old mechanisms of the *sug*. Marketing is imbued with enthusiasm but remains small-scale and somewhat haphazard for all but the big exporters. Meanwhile the economic sustainability of livestock production requires greater attention to fattening, more regularization in the supply and distribution of fodder, and the development of modern abattoirs and a distribution system capable of providing a steady supply of meat to urban markets in the Nile Valley or elsewhere.

CHAPTER 6

Barley, Figs, and Olives: The Old and New Desert Agriculture

The development of new agriculture in the northwest coast has been predicated, in part, on the belief that the whole region flourished with agricultural production during the Greco-Roman-Byzantine millennium of rule in Egypt. We indicated in Chapter 1 that the collapse of ancient desert agriculture was triggered by factors other than the arrival of Bedouin with the Islamic conquest and during the next few centuries. However, in a history of land use in the northwest coast, botanist and desert ecology expert Mohammed Kassas draws on the writings of mainly European colonialists during the first part of the twentieth century and concludes that demise of this ancient agriculture was mainly caused by “the uncontrolled grazing of nomads especially in the eleventh century when destructive invasions of Beni Hilal and Beni Soleim swept the area” (1972:174).

The eastern fourth or so of the northwest coast, an area known as Mareotis in ancient times, clearly sustained a prosperous agriculture for at least several centuries during the Greco-Roman-Byzantine period. Numerous settlements were centered around Lake Mariut, which was then much larger in size than the small saline lake which exists today. Without doubt, farms around the then sweet-water lake were irrigated from its waters, and grapes and other crops flourished. A significant amount of dry farming was also probably practiced in the vicinity. One of early Christendom’s most important shrines and a major monastery, Dair abu-Minas, were located near today’s Burj al-‘Arab and can be taken as an indication of the development of this area in late antiquity.

Kassas takes the Mareotis district as representative of “the whole coastal belt . . . extending to the Libyan . . . border” (1972:167). However, Strabo and other ancient writers clearly distinguish the Mareotis area from the central and western parts of the northwest coast, a region known as Marmarica in ancient times. As mentioned earlier, this area was characterized by mixed barley and pastoral production, with some cultivation of other crops of rather low quality (Bates 1970 [1914]:91–107). Contrary to Kassas and to

considerable popular opinion in Egypt, we conclude that the ancient agriculture of the Mareotis district does not provide a precedent relevant to the development of new agriculture in the Marmarican area of the northwest coast, since the ecology there is different from that of the ancient Mareotis. We also caution against the view that attributes the demise of ancient desert agriculture in Egypt to a single factor, the arrival on the scene of nomadic pastoralists from Arabia.

Bedouin are often stereotyped as unruly people who disdain agriculture and hold farmers in contempt. Historically, some armed and mounted Bedouin extorted tribute from farmers, engaged in intertribal wars that brought serious disruption to sedentary communities, and interferred with long-distance trade and transport across vast desert territories. However, some Bedouin have themselves had to pay tribute to more powerful tribes, as was the case for the Jumi'at in the northwest coast. Some were also seriously affected by the wars of others. Moreover, some Bedouin worked in transport and trade, and most of them regularly participated in orderly commercial transactions with town-based traders and artisans. Many also engaged in agriculture.

We now explore beyond the simplification of the stereotype and discover a more complex reality. We find that Bedouin descendants of the Bani Sulaim have not shirked the hard work of dry farming but have made large patches of the desert seasonally bloom with luscious green fields of barley. Instead of blind contempt for farmers, we discover an ancient system of trade between Bedouin from the northwest coast and farmers in the oasis of Siwa, with long-standing partnerships called *sadaqa*, "friendships" (see Bradbury 1997). Moreover, many Bedouin have embraced new agriculture introduced into the region since around 1960 with enthusiasm and with considerable investment of their own energy and financial resources.

The presentation shows that the new agriculture, unlike the new ranching, is not something the Bedouin themselves created. The *Ta'amir as-Sahari*, agricultural cooperative societies, and development projects of various United Nations agencies and foreign governments have played major roles in its development. The labor of non-Bedouin workers, especially Upper Egyptians, also has been crucial in various stages of its introduction. Thus the new agriculture—mainly olive, fig, and some other horticultural production, along with some greenhouse and other new vegetable and spice production—does not build on the ancient skills and knowledge of the Bedouin derived from their long sustained shifting cultivation of barley and other crops.

As many Bedouin of the northwest coast recognize, new knowledge and expertise are essential for the success of the new agriculture; but the dissem-

ination of relevant new information has tended to be haphazard and informal, as some Bedouin farmers obtain bits and pieces of information from a limited number of agricultural extension agents and other development personnel and many observe the activities of their cohorts and then rush to copy their apparent successes. Producers also call attention to problems with marketing of output, and some complain about the failure to create adequate local facilities, say, to pickle olives, produce olive oil, dry figs, or produce fig jam. A few also note that new horticulture pushes into lands previously devoted to barley cultivation and that new mechanized barley cultivation expands into the old range. A minute minority and ourselves wonder about the implications of these land use changes for land degradation and *tashir*, "desertification."

Agriculture, as defined by economists and most other analysts, includes both crop production and livestock-raising. Thus Ayyad states that "animal husbandry [in the northwest coast] is by far the most important agricultural activity with respect to regional income," and presents figures indicating an annual yield of LE 26.7 million from "meat production"—compared to LE 3.19 million from olives and LE 1.37 million from figs (1992:69, emphasis added). However, following local usage we identify *az-zira'a*, "agriculture," with crop production and consider the region's livestock-raising to be part of a culturally specific system of pastoral production and new ranching. Nonetheless, the two production systems were highly integrated in the past. They are probably less integrated today at the level of farm production, but most of the region's farmers are also livestock-raisers, and income from one activity often finances expansion of the other.

The Old Bedouin Farming and Exchange with Siwa

Some wheat was grown in the northwest coast, along with small-scale production of watermelons, pumpkins, squash, beans, lentils and some other crops. However, barley has long been the region's main staple, with dual use as food and fodder. Dependent on rainfall, the annual production of barley was, and is, subject to wide variations; but barley is said to be an excellent grain crop that, compared to wheat, requires relatively small amounts of water. As previously indicated, people sometimes moved from one area to another to plant barley where it had rained and thus had some flexibility in guaranteeing a barley crop in a region characterized by high variation in local rainfall patterns.

Obermeyer reports major aspects of the old agriculture in Qasr (1968:26–27, 44–58); and we draw heavily on his material for this presenta-

tion. Bedouin there divide the area into three ecologically defined zones. One is the coastal plain which has a good supply of underground water. Various wadis flow into the plain. At the time of his research, before the construction of upstream water harvesting infrastructure during the past two decades or so, the wadis brought considerable runoff into this zone. Coastal sand dunes block runoff, including the reduced flow of today, from pouring into the sea. The water is trapped in extensive networks of underground galleries (*as-sawani*) said to date from Roman times. Water drawn from wells connected to the galleries was long used for irrigating wheat, vegetables, and spices. This water is now pumped mechanically and continues to be used for irrigation. According to Obermeyer, the Awlad 'Ali referred to this part of Qasr as the '*izba*' area, using '*izba*' in the sense of "farm" or "rural settlement," and thought of this zone as having land fertile enough to support a secure and sedentary life.

The second ecological zone lies immediately to the south of the coastal plain and consists of the northern strip of the upland plateau. Wadi Raml, Wadi Madwar, and Wadi Majid have cut deep gorges through this zone, known to the Bedouin as the *sha'ir wa mara'i*, "barley and pasture," area. In the early 1960s, the wadis were used for pasture, and barley was planted in patches on the higher flatlands, where sheep and goats also grazed or browsed. This zone and the coastal plain were associated with the *ma'isha simha*, "good life," by the Bedouin and were contrasted with the third zone, which they associated with the *ma'isha wihsa*, "bad life." This third zone is the more interior part of the plateau, which at that time was devoted to pasture for camels.

As the above indicates, the Bedouin knew the areas where barley could best be grown. In the Qasr area, they chose patches of land with good but shallow topsoil on that part of the plateau which received relatively good rainfall. After the first rain in the fall, they moved quickly to plow and plant the land. Plowing was done by men, with the plow being pulled by a donkey or, if one could afford it, by a camel or a horse. Bedouin told us they formerly used shallow, wooden plows that scratched the surface enough for the seed to be planted but did not loosen the soil so much that it would blow away during periods of high wind. Large bushes on the land were plowed around and thus left intact. Seeds saved from the previous year's harvest were sown, also by men, and are said to have produced high returns—depending, of course, on the rain.

During late spring and early summer, the crop was harvested and collected. Obermeyer notes that the barley was ideally threshed by camels plodding on it because the soft feet of the camel were said to not crush the kernel. Those who could not afford a camel used a heavy wooden sled pulled

by a donkey or a horse for threshing. The winnowing process was usually the responsibility of women.

The grain from the barley was, and is, stored in pits about two meters deep known as *matmura*. These grain stores are either square or bottle-shaped holes cut in the rock. Some are probably of ancient Libyan origin while others date from Greek, Roman, or more contemporary times (Bates 1970 [1914]:171). Grain stored in these vaults can be preserved for two or three years. In the past, much of this grain was consumed by the household that had cultivated it. However, some of the grain was usually sold or given in exchange for dates and olive oil from Siwa. The stalks, "*tibin*," were kept for fodder.

Although barley was the basic staple of the region in the past, the Bedouin did not all have equal access to areas for growing it. Obermeyer shows that two out of seven lineages from the 'Ashaibat in the Qasr area dominated about two-thirds of the land there. These were, and are, the 'Ailat Ma'fas and the 'Ailat Lazumi. The remaining five lineages of the 'Ashaibat, plus a lineage from the Jumi'at, had very small strips of land on the coastal plain and in a part of the barley and pasture area. People from the Kamailat clan of the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar occupied a small area in the southwest of Qasr but had no access to the coastal plain and very little access to land in the barley and pasture area.

No detailed census of these lineages exists. The 'Ailat Ma'fas was, and is, relatively large. Some of the other lineages are relatively smaller. However, the distribution of land was not based on numbers of people but on the ability of households and their surrounding kin networks to assert and maintain claims to land. These claims were based on customary usage passed down from generation to generation. An individual, and his descendants, could lose the right of access to land through selling the right, abandoning the land, or *barawa*, "expulsion," from a clan or lineage because of some crime or serious infraction of tribal codes of proper behavior. Although ready to defend their rights of access to land through resort to violence, recognized customary rights were generally respected among the tribespeople.

People who, as a result of history and/or demography, found themselves with customary rights to little or no land could negotiate with the "owners" and use the land in return for the payment of a fee. This was probably the case for some *murabtin*, but also for some of the Sa'ada. Access to the land of others was also arranged on the basis of reciprocity: we use some of your land this year and you have rights to use some of ours in the future. Sharecropping also existed, whereby a land "owner" entered an arrangement with a *sharik*, "partner," who provided all the labor of cultivating and harvesting a crop in return for a one-half share of the output. In addition, agri-

cultural workers could be, and were, hired by land "owners" for wages. People who worked for wages, paid in cash or kind, were usually men from households with little or no access to land. Such men also contracted to work as shepherds for others. It should be noted, moreover, that all "owners" and workers in the old agriculture were from the Awlad 'Ali, the Jumi'at, and the other clans or tribes in the northwest coast.

The land was not so crowded in the past as it is now. Most households managed one way or another to cultivate at least some barley. Some elderly heads of household from 'Ailat Ma'fas told us they had formerly held land in all three zones of the Qasr area. Most of these have by now consolidated their holdings and concentrate their farm activities either on the coast or higher upstream in wadis in the old barley and pasture area. Holding access to land in all three zones in the past was the ideal, and those who did so tended to be prosperous. Such men usually had relatively large numbers of sheep and, according to Obermeyer, planted as much as a hundred feddans of barley in the early 1960s. However, these prosperous households formed a minority within 'Ailat Ma'fas. Other households within the lineage did not have access to land in all three zones and maintained smaller operations.

Inequalities thus existed between lineages and clans within a given area and among households within a lineage. A few rich and some poor existed, but the majority had small-scale operations adequate to meet most of their household consumption needs as culturally defined in the past. People's security, of course, was always threatened by drought. And warfare, as in the case of the Second World War, brought suffering to all. However, the northwest coast usually produced enough barley in the past to meet local needs, plus a surplus for sale outside of the region and for exchange with the oasis of Siwa.

The region's barley production provided people with the grain for all of the bread they consumed. Other foods were also prepared from barley. Milk and milk products from their animals, especially the goats, provided an important and regular part of their diets, as well as occasional meat. A few had vegetables and many were able to enjoy some watermelon during the summer. Dates formed a main food in their diet, but they did not grow date palms. They produced their own *samn*, but people liked olive oil, and olive trees were not part of the old agriculture in the northwest coast.

The ancient oasis of Siwa lies about 300 kilometers to the south of Marsa Matruh and produces dates and olives in abundance. Trading relations long existed between Siwa and the northwest coast, and the Awlad 'Ali were especially active in the transport of the date crop from Siwa and other Western Desert oases to the Nile Valley. They also engaged in a form of trade with Siwa, which involved the establishment of trading partners and provided

people with the dates and olive oil they needed. In exchange, they provided Siwa with goods from their own surplus production.

A secondary school-educated farmer and local politician from the Awlad 'Ali, a man about forty years old, described this aspect of the old economy, as follows:

Every *qabila* [clan] used to have special caravans that went to Siwa. They used to bring dates and olive oil from there. Each caravan had a special route, a special time. And there was a system called *sadaqa* ["friendship"].

Every man from Siwa had a *sadiq* ["friend"] from the Bedouin. In return for the dates and olive oil, the Bedouin would give the Siwi barley, wheat, and *kishk* made from flour and milk. Also, animals and *samn*. This was trade, but it was not in the modern way or idea of commerce. There were commercial caravans, and these were financed and supplied by merchants. But people from different *qaba'il* would get together and send a caravan of twenty to thirty camels to Siwa to bring back the needed items, mainly olive oil and dates. The individuals who went to Siwa brought back things for the other members of their *qabila*. Each *qabila* would get what it needed.

Individuals who went on these caravans did not sell what they brought back but distributed the goods they transported among the various households that had extended provisions or provided camels for the journey. The system is described as a form of barter, as "people gave some items and got others in return." However, the values of different goods were quoted in money, and supply and demand apparently influenced the "prices" of goods exchanged. Also,

people here depended on the dates from Siwa. If there were no dates, there would not be much to eat. Dates were crucial in the past, and most of the trade was for dates (*tamur*) which could be stored throughout the year.

The *sadiq* was kept from year to year, indeed from generation to generation. Passed on from father to son to grandson. A man from here usually had one *sadiq* in Siwa. But a person from Siwa would have more than one *sadiq*. He would have one in [Sidi] Barrani, another in [Marsa] Matruh, and others in various locations. That's because the *qaba'il* were displaced in different areas.

Some families have maintained this until today. Despite all the changes that have been introduced, there are still social ties between the people. Up until today. On occasions, the *sadiq*, when he comes here, he stays in my house. When we go there, the Bedouin stays with his Siwi *sadiq*. This happens even in the absence of specific trading relations today. At the beginning,

this was a part of trade, but now the ties are mainly social relations. They bring us symbolic gifts of dates, for example. And, from us, they take things like *gara'a*, '*asali* [varieties of gourds] which they like.

Nowadays, Awlad 'Ali do not go to Siwa on camels. They go by cars. They have pick-up trucks and lorries. They go to Alexandria, back and forth in the same day. Now, they trade with different parts of the republic. People from different places in the republic buy things produced in Siwa. They even have industries in Siwa now. And Awlad 'Ali still work in trade, as they also did back in the days of camels. The days of caravans.

As in the cases of trade with Siwa and of livestock-raising, agriculture in the northwest coast has undergone transformation. A new agriculture has been implanted, but important aspects of the old agriculture linger on today. *Raghata*, the reciprocal labor parties mentioned in Chapter 5, were an important feature of the old agriculture and, on occasion, are still activated in the last decade of the twentieth century. Descendants of people who were rich in the old agriculture are among the region's larger-scale farmers today; but some of the larger new farms have been developed by people who, though poor in the past, acquired significant wealth from trade. The scale of farming operations remains skewed, with some moderately large farms, many small-scale endeavors, and cases of people without sufficient land working as sharecroppers and/or for wages as agricultural workers. An example of a sharecropper today is a man from the Awlad 'Ali who farms near Wadi Madwar. He said,

The land I have is not enough to support my family. So, I have to enter into a partnership with a man who has land. He is from the Jumi'at, a friend. He puts up the land. I provide the plowing and the tractor and the seeds. All the labor. We then split the crop in halves. I take half and he takes half.

Farm owners in the ancient Marmarican part of the northwest coast are still almost exclusively from among the Awlad 'Ali and other tribes and clans. Bedouin men and women still provide much of the labor required by the new agriculture. However, reports circulate that investors from the Nile Valley have begun to scout out possibilities of obtaining land for new farms in the region. Moreover, Bedouin owners now recruit Sons of the Nile Valley for work on the farms. They toil as individual "casual" laborers, as members of organized work gangs, and as full-time laborers. A few Sons of the Nile Valley work as sharecroppers. Meanwhile most of the barley is now consumed as fodder by the region's livestock, although a Bedouin lawyer men-

tioned the sale of barley for beer production in the Nile Valley. In marked contrast with the 1960s and before, households today buy much of their food from the market and thus consume relatively little of their own produce.

The New Agriculture

Kassas documents "reclamation experiments" in the northwest coast from about 1900 to the 1950s and indicates the introduction of grapes, olives, and date palms at 'Amriya and al-Kingi at the beginning of the century, the successful planting of *sultani* figs at Sidi Khrair in 1918 and their subsequent expansion over a nearby chain of coastal sand dunes, and the establishment around 1920 of an experimental station at Burj al-'Arab which especially fostered the introduction of olives into the region. He further reports an unsuccessful range improvement experiment in the late 1950s at Ras al-Hikma. He asserts that livestock improvement and range management projects are doomed to failure because the introduction of "range management and organized grazing will require control and organization measures that are impractical . . . and too expensive [to implement]." Instead, he advocates "[p]lantations of figs, olives, and other shrubs [that] represent replacement of the natural climax vegetation (open scrub) by an artificial plant growth with comparable structure and ecological relationships" (1972:172-174).

The reader will remember that an elderly senior from the Awlad 'Ali recalled that olives were introduced in Qasr between the world wars. According to him, "the English gave us seedlings." He thinks they were first distributed by Snow, the British governor said to have been killed by a wounded Bedouin at Wadi Majid during the First World War. He said, "It was a very primitive process. People planted the seedling and hoped it would grow." Some of the seedlings grew and became trees; but the British cut down the trees or otherwise destroyed them not long before the Second World War battle at 'Alamain.

Others also mention the planting of olives before the Second World War. A Bedouin farmer near Wadi Madwar in the old barley and pasture zone said, "My father brought seedlings from Siwa and planted thirty olive trees here in about 1935." Another man in the same area said that his father planted olive trees in 1939, as well as about three hundred *sultani* fig trees before the war. After the war, "We came back and found the trees were broken, cut down. Our government gave us compensation. To those who lost trees, lost cisterns."

The new agriculture that continues to exist, at least in the western part of the northwest coast, began to be introduced after the Second World War. In the words of an elderly senior from the Awlad 'Ali in Qasr,

After 1945, we began to have the *basatin* ["gardens"] here on the coast. Their development was mostly associated with the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*. They are the ones who encouraged us most in terms of agriculture. We had olives at first. As for figs, we used to hear about them in Dihaila. When the cultivation of figs succeeded, we all took to growing figs even more than olives. Figs are especially suitable for drier climates. The *Ta'amir as-Sahari* used to sell us the seedling for 5 piasters. That seedling cost them about 25 piasters. They sent out inspectors to check on the trees. If they found that they were doing well, they would reward us with flour, sugar, and tea donations.

According to a younger man from the Awlad 'Ali,

The greater push for new agriculture came with foreign aid: the World Food Program, the FAO, the Egyptian-German project. These provided an incentive for the new agriculture. Another basic incentive was the closing of the border with Libya [in the mid-1970s]. That interrupted the trade and the smuggling. People began to stay put. And the development projects provided assistance for the planting of new crops.

Associated with the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* and various aid programs and development projects, the new agriculture is one of the changes that emanate from the 1960s. A major feature of its introduction has been the development of cisterns and water harvesting systems to make maximum use of the meager and variable rainfall in the northwest coast. Nile water is supplied by pipeline as far west as Marsa Matruh and can be purchased and transported by tanker to farms. Sufficient to meet minor shortages, this source of water is probably inadequate to meet needs that might result from a severe drought of several years' duration. Fortunately, the northwest has not experienced severe drought since the early 1950s, before significant introduction of new crops.

Cisterns and Water Harvesting

A Bedouin farmer at an inland location on the plateau is critical of many aspects of how development assistance has been implemented by various agencies of the state and development projects. However, he proclaimed, "The *Ta'amir as-Sahari* was the best project in the desert. The main benefit

was the water, the cisterns. Also, the *sadud* ["dams;" "dikes"] for people in the wadis." The new agriculture is dependent on the rain, like the old barley production, but also involves some irrigation from underground water sources. Water is also collected and stored in cisterns, and systems of small dams and dikes control the flow of runoff through wadis.

Underground water can be, and is, tapped for irrigation in limited areas of the northwest coast, a prime example being the coastal plain in Qasr. More widely distributed were more than three thousand underground cisterns. Locally attributed to the Romans, many of the old cisterns are probably of both earlier and later origins. Some of the old cisterns had silted up; but since the 1960s they have been cleaned out, and new ones have been constructed. According to data provided by the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*, 2,959 cisterns were cleaned out or constructed in the governorate of Matruh between 1960 and 1980; as many as 15,185 new cisterns were constructed between 1980 and 1993.

According to an elderly senior from the Awlad 'Ali, who has land in the coastal plain in Qasr and also higher up on the plateau,

The work of digging out the cisterns was mostly done by people from Upper Egypt. For new cisterns, we imitated the old Roman ones. We thought this work was difficult at the beginning, but we found that the earth was not so hard to dig. We also dug out the *sawani* [on the coastal plain].

According to a younger man from the Awlad 'Ali, the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* used "to give a cistern to someone who had two hundred trees. A cistern of about a thousand cubic meters was given only to someone who had at least five hundred trees." The following statement by a Bedouin farmer, about fifty years old, in the old barley and pasture area of Qasr is fairly typical of many we recorded. He and his brother have about 280 olive trees, 600 fig trees, and some almonds, grapes, and apples. Concerning their cisterns, he said:

We have eight cisterns. We got six of them from the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* and the other two from the Egyptian-German project. We did this after my father died in 1980. They gave me money and I arranged for the labor. The *Ta'amir as-Sahari* gave us four pounds per [cubic] meter. I got Upper Egyptians to help, and it really cost us about four pounds per meter. The Upper Egyptians took about two pounds per meter. Actually, the Upper Egyptians dug out two of the cisterns, and then we constructed the others. It was hard work, but we did it. Our cisterns are not too big. The money saved from not having to pay the workers, we used to plaster the sides of the cisterns. They also give

you the cement at reduced prices. The last two cisterns were financed by the Germans. We built them last year. The Germans paid us eight pounds per meter. But these cisterns cost more [than the earlier ones].

The old cisterns are full. The new ones are not, because it did not rain. If there is no rain, we bring water [by tanker from Qasr village or Marsa Matruh] and put it in the cistern.

Generally, Awlad 'Ali, Jumi'at, and other Bedouin farmers and livestock-raisers have received assistance to cover at least part of the costs of constructing a cistern. Some, however, have financed the construction of cisterns with their own savings. The pattern of using Upper Egyptian laborers for some of the work and then doing the work themselves is fairly common, as repeated in the following statement by a farmer from the Awlad 'Ali in Wadi Madwar:

I worked on the cisterns with my sons, and I also brought some Upper Egyptians to help us. The Upper Egyptians are clever. I learned from them and then we did the work ourselves.

The collection and storage of runoff from rain in cisterns is a form of water harvesting. The cisterns are located in depressions toward which runoff naturally flows. The water is channeled into the mouth of the cistern by constructing low and usually long barriers, locally called *gishgish*, out of rocks and by digging shallow runnels. This water, which would otherwise be "lost," is said to be of very good quality and is used for drinking and for irrigation. When a good rain falls, a cistern can fill up during the course of an hour or so.

Since the 1960s a more complex system of water harvesting has been in the process of construction in the wadi systems that run down from the plateau onto the coastal plain and sometimes to the sea. This process was initiated by the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*, and according to their data 2,080 dams or dikes were constructed between 1960 and 1980.

Between 1980 and 1993, 10,415 larger and smaller dams and dikes were built. This system of water harvesting involves the construction of a series of small dams and dikes to hold back water flowing through a wadi and to divert it into fields. Spillways are constructed so that water continues to flow to fields further down stream. Observation indicates that such a system existed in the wadis of the northwest coast in ancient times, and the ruins of similar systems have been identified in parts of north Sinai (Jarvis 1936:128–129) and in Jordan (Abu Jaber, Gharaibeh, and Hill 1987:122–124). According to a German engineer in charge of developing these systems as

part of the Egyptian-German Qasr Rural Development Project, the development of water harvesting in wadis should be seen as a part of land reclamation. The work involves land leveling and sometimes the movement of topsoil within a wadi and its side wadis and catchment areas. A series of larger and smaller dams and dikes with spillways are built to control and disperse water flow. Land leveling in the Qasr area is done by local contractors with the use of bulldozers. The dams and dikes are sometimes constructed by hired laborers, but the Bedouin farmer and his sons usually do much of the work. Many of the dams and dikes are built with stones from the land. But many of the older ones were earth-filled and have sometimes collapsed.

According to the engineer, water harvesting and land reclamation work in a wadi should start at the top of the wadi and then systematically continue downstream. However, in Qasr the work is done piecemeal. Farmers apply for assistance on an individual basis, and the project then provides part of the costs and technical advice about where to place the dams and dikes and how to construct them. The engineer says that the old system, locally attributed to the Romans, was more sophisticated and more comprehensively designed for the whole wadi system than is the work currently being carried out (Regner, personal communication: 1994).

We found many instances of dams and dikes in wadis and saw green fields, olive trees, and figs in areas that until the 1960s or later were not cultivated but were left for grazing. Bedouin farmers confirmed the development of the water harvesting described above. According to one,

I have eight *sadud*. They are from the German project. We worked hard in building them. They said they will pay eight pounds per meter. If the meter costs me twelve pounds, I will have to pay the difference. They do not pay until the work is completed. I got local people to help me. We did not hire anybody; we did the work ourselves. I have cement *sadud* and stone *sadud*.

Another farmer in Wadi Madwar said,

I have five *sadud* with cement and six without, just rocks. Five of the *sadud*, the older ones, came from the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*. We got assistance from them through the central cooperative society. The cooperative is good. We have a local cooperative here and all the members are from our *qabila*, from 'Ailat Ma'fas. But assistance for cisterns, *sadud*, and cement comes from the central cooperative in Marsa Matruh.

The dam with the spillway is from the German project, and also the other five *sadud*. We built all of these *sadud* ourselves. No Upper Egyptians. The project paid me 28 pounds per meter. The cost was 35 pounds, and I paid the

remainder. I did not know how to build them. So, they sent out an engineer to show me how. Then, he came back and checked them when we had finished.

We still have work to do on the land. We have to level it. They rent us a bulldozer and they make us pay 25 percent of the cost.

The water harvesting infrastructure for new agriculture has not been introduced on a comprehensive basis for the whole region. The Qasr area, for example, has benefited more than many other areas. The more remote areas have especially been neglected. Assistance has also not been distributed equitably among all farmers. Most of the aid programs have required that the beneficiary cover some portion of the costs, and many of the programs only pay their share when the work has been completed. Very poor farmers often have not been able to raise the capital needed to take advantage of the assistance. Nonetheless, new cisterns abound in the northwest coast, while new dams and dikes proliferate in many of the region's wadis.

The development of water resources fostered an increase of livestock-raising on the range. Likewise, the new water harvesting allows for more intensive and expanded use of land for agriculture. Thus new farms with figs and olives have pushed into areas formerly devoted to pasture or to barley. Meanwhile the large-scale use of tractors pulling deep steel plows has triggered new barley cultivation in the more arid parts of the range. The natural flora is destroyed and the topsoil loosened. Consequent wind erosion on the plateau occurs, with potential for land degradation and, perhaps, eventual desertification (see Ayyad 1992:18). Wadis occasionally flow with rampage, and torrents of water break through poorly constructed dams, especially older ones without spillways. Serious water erosion in wadis is a result.

Selected New Farms

For a closer look at the new agriculture we provide cases of farms as we were told about them by their Bedouin owners. The first case is probably the largest farming operation in Qasr and also one of the area's oldest. This farm is held as *jumla* by an elderly senior and his sons, of whom one is a high-ranking bank official and another a physician. A third son manages the farm on a daily basis under the general supervision of his father. The senior's father was one of the largest-scale livestock-raisers and barley cultivators based in Qasr in the old nomadic agro-pastoralist system.

The farm has land in one of the upland wadi systems and makes use of dams and dikes in that area. However, much of the farm's land is on the coastal plain; and, "There are no *sadud* here. In fact, the *sadud* that were built

higher up affected us negatively here on the coast." Crops on the coast are irrigated with water pumped from the *sawani*, or underground galleries. The farm has about two thousand olive trees and at least several thousand fig trees. According to the senior, "We have figs of different ages. I don't know how many. We have a lot of figs." He also mentioned that they do not grow any almonds or pomegranates and said they had tried to grow peaches and apples; but, "It was no good, no success."

Discussing labor on the farm, the elderly senior said that back in the 1960s, "the people who worked in the agriculture were our sons and brothers. If you didn't have enough relatives, you could hire people. They worked for a daily rate of about 25 piasters." By contrast, farm laborers in the mid-1990s charge seven pounds a day. He said they do not rent out any of their land to others, but some of the land devoted to vegetables and spices is farmed by sharecroppers from among the Bedouin in Qasr. As the senior put it,

We enter into partnerships with people who want to work. We divide the crop. He takes half and we take half. We do not lose. The landowner provides the seeds and the tractor. The partner just provides the heavy labor. Sometimes, if he does a good job, he gets more than 50 percent.

The land in olive and fig groves is sometimes plowed with the use of tractors, and, on occasion, the trees are irrigated. Water is taken from the *sawani* and transported to the groves in small tanks on wagons pulled by a tractor. Water is then distributed around each tree with the use of a hose from the tank. This work is usually done by one or another of the senior's grandsons. The olives and figs are harvested by hired workers. According to the son who manages the farm, "There are people here waiting to be employed, from the Arabs. They may be children or women. The olives and figs are harvested by a number of people." These workers are paid on the basis of how much they collect. In the case of olives, a worker is paid LE 1 or LE 1.25 per *safifa*, a container that holds ten kilograms.

A case of a new small farm is one located near Wadi Majid in the old barley and pasture zone of Qasr. The owner says he inherited the land from his fathers and grandfathers and that all of the farm's land used to be grazing land. He has eight dams and dikes on his property and speaks of the land as having been reclaimed. The farm has several hundred olive trees and about two hundred figs. Some sheep are also raised. The owner and his sons do all of the work on the farm and in herding the animals. He did not go to school, but his sons are studying. About himself, he said, "I never did any work other than what I am doing now."

Another small farm is nearby in Wadi Madwar. This farm is held as *jumla* between two brothers. One of these men said the land was first cultivated more than fifty years ago by his father. He and his brother planted about 250 olive trees, mostly Spanish olives, in the 1970s. He says they were among the first to plant olives in the old barley and pasture zone. The farm also has six hundred fig trees. The most recent additions to the farm are twenty apple trees, eight almond trees, twenty-five pomegranate trees, and about fifty grape vines. The seedlings were purchased through the Egyptian-German project and were all planted around 1993. The farm has about seventy sheep and also grows beans, tomatoes, watermelons, and barley. All of the farm labor is done by the owners and their sons, with occasional use of hired workers for the olive and fig harvests.

Concerning the new agriculture, one of the brothers said, "We want to plant all this new land with figs, olives, and almonds. Most of these just take water from the rain in the winter. I like this agriculture." About himself, he said, "I am employed in the school. I work there as a *farrash* [“janitor”]. I had an exam yesterday. It was difficult. It is a literacy class. It's good; I learned how to write my name. I have a good income from my salary and from the agriculture." He also said he buys flour, rice, tomatoes, oil, "everything for the house." Almost all of the farm's produce is sold, but, "we keep the wool from the sheep. I have a new blanket and a kilim from the wool."

Late one afternoon just before dusk we sat on the ground in a grove of olive trees in the northern part of the plateau. One could barely see Marsa Matruh in the distance. Nearby was a small kiosk where we had seen a couple of forlorn looking soldiers buy a small packet of cookies. The owner of the kiosk joined us and offered us some excellent *sultani* figs. He is a man from 'Ailat Ma'fas of the 'Ashaibat of the Awlad 'Ali al-Ahmar, and says he was born in 1925. He quietly and eloquently told us about his farm:

I have olive trees that were planted in 1939. My father and his brothers planted them. Olive trees live even if there is no rain, but if there is no rain or not much rain, they will not produce much or even anything. We have had droughts, but we always get a little rain. And there is the dew.

My father had three hundred olive trees. I now have a thousand trees. I have some figs, but only from about five years ago. We used to have white figs called *sultani*. They were for our own consumption. We still have a few. We now have red figs which go to the market and the factories. The *sultani* are much better than the red ones.

I also have watermelons and barley and now new things, like apples, grapes, almonds, and pomegranates. The grapes are doing very well; we started them a few years ago. At the very beginning, I took assistance from the

Ta'amir as-Sahari and more recently from the Egyptian-German project. We took assistance from them, but we paid for what we took.

I have eight sons and six sons from two wives. All of my fourteen sons are with me. I work with my sons. My brother is my neighbor, but he is on his own. We do not have a *jumla* between us. From time to time, I get outside workers, like when we are harvesting the olives or when we are preparing the land for cultivation. We get a tractor. I don't own a tractor. I rent it from the cooperative in Qasr. I rent it for five pounds an hour. If I get it from outside, I have to pay 10 pounds an hour.

I have only about fifty sheep now, but sometimes I have up to two hundred. When I have two hundred head, I usually give them to a shepherd. When there is no rain, I sell them before they die. I sell them because I don't want to invest in fodder and because I cannot afford to invest in it. When they don't have green vegetation to eat, they don't have many lambs. When there is no rain, I sell either half or one-third of the herd.

The grandfathers of my grandfather were all here on this land. I have never left this land, except when they sent us to Bahaira [during the Second World War]. We didn't do anything there. We just went to the camps to get food. We were there for four years. Then, they brought us back on the train in 1944 and they took us in trucks to our original places. I have not left since 1944. I have not been on the pilgrimage. My children go to school. It is far away and they really suffer from the long walks, especially in the rainy season.

We present a final case of a farm in another area near Nigaila. This farm is unusual because it is has been developed farther south on the plateau than is the case with other new farms. The farm is about eight kilometers south of the international highway, and the cultivated areas are all slightly lower than the rest of the land. Thus water flows into the cultivated patches. The trees are all in very straight lines. The farmer says he hires about twenty-five to thirty Upper Egyptians from Marsa Matruh for about twenty days to plow under the figs and other trees where the tractor cannot reach. Otherwise, one of his sons plows with the tractor. Also, people from 'Arish, in North Sinai, are contracted for the fig harvest.

In addition to the farm, the owner has about nine hundred sheep. At the time of our visit, about five hundred of the sheep were with a hired shepherd and the shepherd's son on rented barley pasture near Nigaila. The shepherd takes five hundred pounds per month. The remainder of the sheep (four hundred) were kept near the farm and were herded by the owner's sons. These sheep were being fattened for export. The sheep are sheared by people from Bahaira.

The Bedouin owner is a man about sixty years old and is from a clan affiliated to the Awlad 'Ali al-Abiad. He described his farm and its development, as follows:

I began this project in the 1980s. Before that, I was only raising sheep. I also worked in trade and had shops in Nigaila. I sold things there from merchandise I brought from Marsa Matruh, Alexandria, and Cairo. Since I started the agriculture here, I have been expanding it. We depend on animals and on agriculture, and both depend on rain. If Allah gives us rain, that is fine. If Allah does not give us rain, then He alone knows what that year is like.

This land is the land of my grandfathers. They planted barley here. It was very primitive. They also had camels and sheep. Our grandfathers did not have the cisterns, did not know how to build them. We have fruit gardens and we are optimistic about even more and better production in the future. We are optimistic because this land has underground water, according to a German expert who visited us some time ago.

The land here was uncultivated. We wanted to cultivate it. So we brought laborers to clear the land of stones. And we gradually brought graders to level the land, as part of the preparation of the land before cultivating. I had a tractor which was from the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*, a used one, which I bought and repaired and then used in the early preparation.

The *Ta'amir as-Sahari* did not give me anything, no money, nothing—neither then nor now. They started in 1959, but they did not have hardly anything. They had nothing. They brought a few tractors, but then they did not bring any more. The cooperatives had a few tractors, though.

The first tree I planted was in 1980. I like agriculture, and I thought that instead of working on other people's land for a payment or working and sharing the agricultural output with others on their land, that I would start to cultivate my own land. It is distant from the lands cultivated by others, which are mainly near the coast. It was hard at the beginning, especially because of the stray camels. They used to eat everything we cultivated. So, we had to build a wire fence around us. It cost about eleven thousand pounds. We got the wire from the central cooperative and from shops in the market. I financed this and almost everything else through the sale of animals. I sell sheep to those who export to Saudi Arabia.

A journalist, English or American, asked us why don't you go to the bank to get money? So, I told him we have two banks. I borrow from the summer bank to finance the winter bank. And I take from the winter bank for the summer bank. The journalist did not understand. I explained to him that I have animals and I have agriculture. Still, he did not understand. In the summer, the agricultural bank produces figs, almonds, grapes. The winter

bank would probably have no capital. So, we take from the summer bank and we buy fodder and finance the winter bank. In the winter, the agriculture needs investment in plowing, pesticides, and so forth. So, we take from the summer bank to finance the winter bank. Finally, the journalist understood. And the journalist said that if everybody in the desert did like we do, no one would need any assistance.

I have seven cisterns, each from 100 to 150 cubic meters. Plus one *khazan* ["underground tank"] which can store up to three thousand cubic meters. We use the water for ourselves and the animals. The agriculture depends on the rain. Somehow, we always have rain here. At the beginning of the project, before the cisterns, I brought water from other places by tankers for the agriculture. At the beginning, the seedlings needed a lot of water, and the rain was not sufficient. Now, they need less water and I have all these cisterns. Every year there is enough rain for my agriculture.

I have eighteen hundred olive trees, and more figs. I have about seven hundred feddans cultivated here. Most of it is in figs. We also have almonds, peaches, grapes, nectarines. The figs are the most appropriate crop for my land and they also bring in good revenue. More successful than olives. The market for figs fluctuates, like the market for animals. The figs are picked at different times throughout the season. The olives are picked all at one time and, if the market is low, tough luck.

The olives were brought in by the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* from Spain. They sold the seedlings for piasters, but they had cost them much more. They also follow up by sending engineers to check on how the trees are doing. If they are doing well, people receive further support. People also got support from the World Food Program. I took support from them. The seedlings for the nectarines and other things came from the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* in 1980 and 1984. After that, they did not bring anything. And I did not take anything from them.

Visitors to new farms on land that was formerly arid range are invariably impressed by the new production. Figs, olives, and other varieties of fruit trees seem to confirm that development is firmly taking hold in this part of the desert. Moreover, a few farms now include greenhouses, which suggests the introduction of a high-tech variety of new agriculture in the area. Their introduction has been fostered by several development programs, most notably an FAO project from the late 1980s. According to one Awlad 'Ali farmer,

The greenhouses have been a successful experiment. Our agriculture depends on rain; and one might have to buy water which is expensive. If I have no cis-

tern, I will have to buy water and that will be expensive. The greenhouses, as I have tried them, consume less water, take up less space, and produce more output. We have cucumbers, tomatoes, green peppers. Although costly, greenhouse production fetches good prices in the market. Usually, the market is in winter when prices are good. We can sell our production anywhere in Egypt, in Alexandria or Cairo. But I sell my produce here in Qasr. There is enough demand for what I can supply. There is no marketing problem for products from the greenhouse agriculture. Because that which is produced is not too much.

The experimental introduction of greenhouses has also encountered failures. An extreme example is the case of the last farm described above. The owner says he accepted two greenhouses and obtained all the apparatus for irrigation. He tried them for a year and grew tomatoes, "but the output was not worth it." Income from the sale of what was produced "did not even equal the cost of the water, not counting our labor." He says seeds for "improved varieties" of tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers were distributed at high prices through the central cooperative society in Marsa Matruh. However, he claims the seeds were rotten and the plastic out of which the greenhouses were constructed was "no good." He says he told the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* and the central cooperative society to take the greenhouses away. A long controversy, including litigation in court, followed. Details of the controversy are irrelevant here. However, as the farmer said, "All of this was new for us and for the agricultural engineers."

Appropriate training and the dissemination of expert knowledge are essential for the new agriculture, but they are limited in Egypt for agriculture outside the Nile Valley (see Mansour and Ismail 1993). One Bedouin farmer told us that the directorate of agriculture in Marsa Matruh has engineers who "help us with agriculture, but I do not go to them for technical assistance or advice. We learn by experience." Another Bedouin farmer said that a few agricultural engineers are available and that people can discuss their various problems with them. He noted that "the cultivator today wants the new technology of agriculture, new seeds." They see successful projects of others, want the same for themselves, and learn from each other. For him, a more serious constraint that confronts the new agriculture is the problem of marketing. In his words,

We depend on rain for agriculture. However, the basic problem we face is the marketing of what we produce. None of the aid projects has thought about or worked toward solving the problem of marketing.

Marketing

Matruh's central cooperative society, the directorate of agriculture, and development projects related to the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* have been responsible for the provision of most inputs required by the new agriculture. Seeds and seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides, tractors and other equipment have thus all been made available by the state, usually at highly subsidized prices. Farmers complain that items sometimes have not been available when needed. One farmer said, for example, "We used to be totally dependent on the government to provide us with pesticides. If they did not have them or they did not arrive on time, we could not do anything." The sale of some output, especially olives, has also been managed through the central cooperative.

Olives produced in the northwest coast are sometimes converted into olive oil by small-scale primitive presses owned and operated by individuals. Farmers take small proportions of the harvest to the presses and use the oil for their own household needs. Very little, if any, of this oil is sold. Some small enterprises, mainly owned by people from Siwa, exist in Marsa Matruh. A few producers sell their olives to these enterprises, which then pickle the olives or convert them to oil for sale in the local market. However, the main procurer of olives has been the Krum Company, a public sector enterprise that forwards the olives to the Gianaclis Company based in the Nile Valley.

Farmers complain that income from the sale of olives is low. According to a major producer, "We take the olives to the Krum Company. Later on, we are paid by the central cooperative. The price is not good." Aside from low prices, the owner of a moderate-sized farm called attention to another problem. He says he and his brother formerly sold their olives to the Krum Company. Like most other producers, they took the olives to the company, obtained a receipt for them, took the receipt to the central cooperative society, and then got paid. However,

the old man who sits at the company, we caught him cheating. My brother and I weighed our olives, and they came to 170 kilograms. We took them to Krum, and the old man insisted they only weighed 100 kilograms. What could we do? We had to accept, but we never went back.

We made a commotion, but we did not get anything. We reported this incident to [a high-ranking official in the *Ta'amir as-Sahari*] and to [a respected '*aqila*] himself. We told them that this man is always cheating, tipping the scales. We told them that the company is filled with thieves. But

there was nothing anybody could do. So, we now sell to a merchant, 'Ali. He is from Awlad 'Ali, from the Jumi'at. He takes all kinds of olives, for pickling and for oil.

Whether true or not, the company has long held a monopsony for the purchase of olives. Moreover, the company was moribund at the time of our research, as it was being phased out of existence as a result of Egypt's structural adjustment program prescribed by the IMF. That program calls for significant privatization of public sector enterprises, but no clear alternative had yet materialized for the large-scale processing, distribution, and sale of olives produced in the northwest coast. In contrast to olives, the marketing of figs has always been left to private initiative. However, the sale of figs has been even more problematic than the sale of olives, as the following comment indicates:

The figs have to travel far and they spoil rapidly. There is a middle man (*wasit*) between the merchant and the cultivator of figs. The middle man comes in the sixth month [June] and pays an advance to the various cultivators. Then, he returns during the fig season with a truck and takes away the fig production, sixty baskets from so and so, fifty from someone else, and so on. This truck goes to Cairo, and the merchant there decides the price. He is free. The middle man deducts the cost of labor, transport, storage; sometimes, the basket of figs will be no more than one Egyptian pound for the cultivator. The basket contains five kilograms.

That is why some people now are giving up on figs. In fact, starting two years ago, some cultivators stopped growing figs. There seems to be an over supply of figs on the market. This always pushes the price down. The government gives money to grow and invests in the development of this new agriculture, but in the case of figs, the return, the profits, are not good to say the least.

Contracting to buy figs still on the trees follows an old system widely used by traders in the Nile Valley to purchase fruit for later transport to and sale in urban markets. Known as *kalala*, this system often becomes disadvantageous for small-scale producers in remote areas served by only a few traders. With little or no competition among traders, the rules of monopsony prevail. Traders who operate this system in the northwest coast are almost all Bedouin from the region, and farmers say they trust them. According to one farmer, "Traders from the Awlad 'Ali come out and make arrangements to buy the figs. Later on, they come in their trucks and take the figs away. I

don't know where they take them or how they sell them, but they always give us our money." Social ties perhaps mitigate some potential conflicts of interest between producers and traders; but Bedouin traders in the region often remark that "trade is trade."

Large-scale Bedouin producers seldom market farm output through *kalala*. The son of a large-scale producer of figs explained that when the figs are harvested, they are put in baskets provided by the cultivator. Transporters collect the figs, take them to Cairo, and are paid for the cost of transport. The farmer said, "We trust these people. They are from the Awlad 'Ali, from Ras al-Hikma." They deliver the figs to the main wholesale market in Cairo at Rawd al-Farag and give them to a broker, known as a *komisiongi*. The broker sells the figs by auction and takes a 10 percent commission on the sale. The price is determined by supply and demand and, of course, depends on the quality of the figs. The *komisiongi* sends invoices to the producer indicating the total amount of the sale and his commission. According to the farmer, "We can check on him by asking others what the price is." In his estimation,

if we sell a hundred baskets for 500 pounds, the *komisiongi* takes 50 pounds. The transporter takes 100. What remains is 350. Even after deducting the cost of labor for harvesting and collecting the figs, we are still making good money. Whatever remains in the end is fine. No problem.

Local Evaluations of the New Agriculture

To conclude, we present comments by three local people that call attention to major issues they identify as problems that confront the new agriculture. Their comments are eloquent and strong enough to stand on their own without further elaboration by us. The first comment is by a Son of the Nile Valley, a university-educated man in his early thirties who is from the old migrants long settled in Marsa Matruh. He and a university-educated man of the same age from the Awlad 'Ali joined together as partners to obtain land through the President Hosni Mubarak program for university graduates in the eastern part of the northwest coast.

We did not investigate the new agriculture in this area, which comprises much of the ancient Mareotis district. However, we note that the Bahig canal and, more recently, the much larger Nasr canal bring Nile water to the area as part of the large-scale desert land reclamation process described in Chapter 2. Peasants from the Nile Valley have moved in and engage in new agriculture there. Investors, often absentee, from the Nile Valley have farms

there. Some of the Bedouin have also benefited from this land reclamation and new agriculture. When we asked about this area, the Son of the Nile Valley responded, as follows:

Along the coast, you see all the new tourist villages. The government and people have invested billions in those silent, concrete structures. Those billions could have been invested in a better way. For example, the Nasr canal brings water to Hammam. You don't see it from the highway, but it is a big canal and it can bring water and make everything green. But young people, graduates, who have land there still do not have water for their farms.

I told the governor about the young people who received land in a village near Hammam about six years ago. They have all the equipment, everything. But they have not yet received any water from the canal. In whose interest is it for Egypt to remain waiting for American wheat? The governor said to me "Son, do you think your village is everything? The Minister of Irrigation is in charge of irrigation." In whose interest does he [the governor] work? In whose interest is it to have all of these tourist villages when all of the productive land is not yet irrigated?

I have a friend who made a model farm and invested in it; he got money from a relative in England, and he sold his own car. He prepared the land for cultivation. Sometimes, they provided him with water, and he was able to cultivate wheat. But the water did not always come. When he needed water at a critical point, the last watering of the crop, the water did not arrive. So, he lost his crop, more than half of it. He lost his money. He despaired and left the land. After he left, the whole village lost its spirit. I feel that nobody really cares for this country. The water was right there; the irrigation engineers just did not bother to send it to the farm.

The second comment is by a Bedouin farmer in Qasr, who completed secondary school and is about forty years old. We quoted him above concerning the problem of marketing. He also said,

None of the development projects complete the whole cycle. They always focus on production only. The project officials also rely on consultants. If they were to talk to us, to the people ourselves, they would know more about what we want and need. The people responsible for these aid projects do not come here and sit with us and talk. We see the Egyptian officials; but if the representative of FAO had come to me and asked me anything, maybe I would have discussed with him the business of factories, the need to process our products here in the region.

I am sure that these people of the World Bank and the FAO and the World Food Program have good thinking and they have a mission. They want what is good for us. They are not coming for other reasons. But they were not able to reach us, and we were not able to reach them. Most of these experts come from outside. It's true, of course, that we don't have the skills here.

Some of the Arabs have money now of their own. Are they likely to invest it in developing this agriculture further? In setting up a factory to process the figs into jam? A private factory for pickling olives and making olive oil? It is not clear. It is obvious that the government has many financial burdens now and that privatization will shift some of these burdens to the people. But the Arabs don't like dealing in contracts, in paperwork, and most of all in paying taxes. Sheep have no taxes. He thinks that if he has animals, no one can know what his capital is. But if he starts a factory, people will see it, and the taxes will catch up with him.

Some people have suggested a company with shares in which cultivators, especially of figs, participate. But that is a long process which requires a different way of thinking from what the Arabs feel today. It requires a reorientation. It also requires leadership. The '*umda*' and the shaikh cannot play that role. Neither can the '*aqila*'. The ideas are there in people's heads, but fears stop them from taking action.

Finally, we turn to an elderly senior from the Awlad 'Ali who taught us much about his people and the northwest coast. As context for his comment, the reader should remember that half a century ago the northwest coast was littered with war debris left behind by foreign armies. Today, plastic bags litter much of the region, carelessly thrown away by tourists, soldiers, townspeople, and Bedouin. One evening, after a long discussion of agriculture with the old man, he concluded as follows:

I want to remind you of something about the desert, since you are studying the desert. Maybe your words will reach those who make decisions and are in responsible positions. The plastic that you see all around is going to destroy all the animals. If the animal eats it, the plastic makes a ball inside the stomach and kills it. If the government does not do anything for the next ten years, the sheep, goats, and camels will all be gone. Also, the rain does not reach the soil. The plastic stops the water and it evaporates off the bag. Agriculture will be finished.

CHAPTER 7

Tourism and Holiday-Making: Egypt and Marsa Matruh

Research about Egypt's northwest coast cannot ignore the region's tourism development. It has played a major role in the area's transformation and also increasingly provides strong links between the region and the rest of Egypt. Indeed, the northwest coast *is* tourism and holiday-making for many Nile Valley Egyptians. The Bedouin, their livestock-raising, and their old and new agriculture are hardly noticed by most of those who journey to the area for its beaches. How many people spend summer holidays there is not known precisely, but Matruh governorate statistics indicate about six hundred thousand registered visitors in 1993. Egyptian newspaper accounts mention as many as two million visitors to the northwest coast in the summer of 1994. Almost all of these holiday-makers are Egyptians, although modest numbers of other Arabs and a few foreigners also visit.

Many of the holiday-makers stay in new tourist villages which have been developed along the shore since around 1980, and we discuss these villages in the next chapter. However, our focus in this chapter is on Marsa Matruh, where a boom in the building of new hotels and of apartments for holiday-use has recently brought major change to the small city. Tents pitched on its beaches and a modest stock of old hotels also house increasing numbers of visitors.

Marsa Matruh is Egypt's second most important summer holiday site in terms of numbers of visitors, after Alexandria, and its tourism sector, as we show, has roots that go back to the early decades of the twentieth century and especially flourished during the 1950s and 1960s. However, before presenting material on tourism development in Marsa Matruh we invite the reader on a brief excursion to introduce the phenomenon of tourism and holiday-making in Egypt-at-large. Leisure-time activities for visitors in Marsa Matruh, and also in the new tourist villages, have their own specificities but constitute integral parts of Egypt's national tourism and holiday-making scenes.

Egypt

The tourism industry in Egypt encompasses a wide range of large- and moderate-scale enterprises, along with numerous small-scale activities by individual citizens. Thus, and not unlike many other economic activities in Egypt, the country's tourism is characterized by the co-existence of formal, semiformal, and informal sectors. The formal sector is large-scale and falls under the general supervision of the ministry of tourism. What we call the semiformal sector consists of small- and moderate-sized hotels, restaurants, and other tourism enterprises that are registered with and regulated by local government authorities but not the national tourism ministry. The informal sector is small-scale, unregistered, and unregulated. The industry also has a long history in modern Egypt and caters to diverse clienteles, locally classified into three main categories—foreign tourists (*as-su wah*), (other) Arab tourists, and local holiday-makers (*al-mustafin*). Tourism, broadly defined as leisure-time activities that involve travel, substantively differs in Egypt on the basis of these three categories.

More than 3,200,000 Arab and foreign tourists spent almost 22 million tourist nights in the country in 1992; in 1996, the number of visitors increased to nearly four million and the tourist nights to almost 24 million (CAPMAS 1997:266–268). The magnitude of local holiday-making is not comprehensively measured, but its total volume is, without doubt, greater than that of foreign and Arab tourism combined. Foreign tourism is especially associated with the formal sector, while local holiday-making mainly engages the informal and semiformal sectors. Arab tourism focuses, at least in part, on the formal sector but is also strongly involved with the two other sectors.

Foreign Tourism

Egypt's foreign tourism began in the nineteenth century, as upper-class British, French, and German travelers came to see the monuments of ancient Egypt and to enjoy the country's warm, dry climate, sometimes for curative purposes. Numerous colonial officials and other personnel also stopped over while enroute to and from India and other European colonies. This tourism, which flourished until the outbreak of the Second World War, was especially associated with Thomas Cook and Company, one of the world's first travel agencies, and with famous hotels such as Shepheard's in Cairo, the Winter Palace in Luxor, and the Cataract in Aswan. Elegant cruises on the

Nile were common features of this tourism, which also included stays at the then-elegant health spa and resort at Helwan just south of Cairo.

With some exceptions, the present-day foreign tourist to Egypt follows much the same itinerary as his or her nineteenth or early twentieth century predecessor. Helwan, having become an industrial suburb of Cairo, of course no longer attracts tourists to its hot, mineral-water baths. Indeed, foreign tourists no longer journey to Egypt for curative purposes but are mainly attracted by the glories of ancient Egypt. Their main destinations are Cairo, Luxor and Aswan in Upper Egypt, and Abu Simbel in Nubia. Europeans continue to predominate among foreign visitors, but Italians, Spanish, Dutch, Scandinavians, and, for some periods, Russians and others from the former Soviet Union, have joined the British, French, and Germans as frequent tourists in Egypt. Japanese, Australians, North Americans, and Latin Americans also visit in significant numbers. The majority of these travel to Egypt on package tours arranged and paid for abroad. These tourists arrive by airplane at Cairo International Airport, where they are met by an Egyptian tour leader employed by a formally organized local Egyptian tourist company. The group traveling together on the package is usually transported by bus to hotels in Cairo or Giza, usually five- or four-star hotels. Most of these large hotels are at least partly foreign-owned and are almost always managed by foreign chains—including Hilton, Sheraton, Marriott, Oberoi, Meridien, Sofitel, Sonesta, Helnan, Movenpick, and so on.

These foreign tourists spend at least a couple of days in the greater Cairo area for organized tours on air-conditioned buses led by Egyptian tour guides, formally licensed by the state and employed by local tourist companies. From Cairo, the package tourist is usually transported by airplane to Upper Egypt, although a few travel by overnight train. Some take Nile cruises between Aswan and Luxor. In Upper Egypt, as in Cairo, their visits are highly organized by tour leaders and tour guides. They stay in hotels similar to the ones in Cairo, take most of their meals in the hotel, use the hotel's swimming pool, and, if so inclined, have their drinks at the hotel's bar. The hotel or boat, if a Nile cruise, usually has a "folkloric" presentation in a night club with a belly dancer and an Upper Egyptian stick dance. At some point during their visit, the group will have a *galabiya* party in which they all dress up in touristic versions of "traditional" Egyptian dress, often with phoney Arab headdresses for men.

Most package tours to Egypt are short, between about five and ten days; the average visitor from Europe spent 6.7 nights in Egypt in 1992 and 6.4 in 1996 (*ibid*). The foreign tourist has a busy schedule of visits to mainly ancient Egyptian sites and, as the reader will have surmised, he or she has limited contact with "ordinary" Egyptians. Many of these tourists never

leave the security of their group. The package tours, of course, do include some free time, and some participants venture out on their own. However, "guest" contacts with the "host" population seldom extend beyond the Egyptian tour leader, tour guide, hotel and restaurant workers, site guards, sellers in tourist bazaars, hawkers, and taxi, bus, and carriage drivers. Some perhaps encounter an assortment of young Egyptian men more or less hanging out in hopes of a rewarding contact of one type or another. In rare cases of trouble, the foreign tourist may also meet the tourist police.

Package tours for foreigners to Cairo and Upper Egypt are the epitome of Egypt's formal tourism sector. Despite recent attacks against the tourism sector and on tourists by political dissidents, thousands of foreigners enter Egypt, visit the major monuments, shop in touristic bazaars, and leave the country without major mishap or undue disorder. Moreover, the infrastructure that supports this tourism, for the most part, is good and has undergone considerable expansion and upgrading during the past decade or so since the early and mid-1980s. The formal tourism sector is further supported by considerable institutional development. For example, vocational schools and post-secondary higher institutes exist to train students for hotel and other tourism-related work.

A new dimension has been added recently to the foreign tourist scene in Egypt. Since the early 1980s, sand, sea, and diving-oriented tourism has mushroomed on the Red Sea coast at Hurghada and at various sites in south Sinai, especially at Sharm ash-Shaikh, Nuwaiba, and Dahab. Some sites in Sinai were first developed under Israeli military occupation during the 1970s. However, many of these sites were severely damaged by individual Israelis just prior to Israel's evacuation of this part of Egypt's sovereign territory in 1982. Equipment in hotels was trashed, and beaches were strewn with shards of broken glass. The Egyptian authorities organized a massive clean up of the beaches and initiated repairs or replacement of broken equipment. Large-scale construction of new hotels, tourist villages, diving facilities, and other tourism-related infrastructure was initiated more or less simultaneously in Sinai and at Hurghada, and these sites now cater to both local holiday-makers and foreign tourists. Sand, sea, and diving have opened up a new market for foreign tourism in Egypt. Europeans, especially Germans and French and increasingly Russians, predominate among the foreign visitors to these new sites. Many come on package tours and fly directly to Hurghada or Sharm ash-Shaikh. Some of these tourists may also visit ancient Egyptian sites in the Nile Valley; but many come expressly for the beaches and coral reefs and/or other leisure activities. Conversely, some foreign tourists who come principally to see ancient Egyptian sites now choose to spend a few days at a site on the Red Sea.

Foreign tourists, of course, do not all come to Egypt on package tours. Some come as individuals, especially European students and backpackers. Typically, they stay in inexpensive small hotels, which we classify as forming part of Egypt's semiformal tourism sector. They usually travel by train from Cairo to Upper Egypt and by bus to Sinai and the Red Sea coast. In addition, many of them travel, also by bus, to the oases of the New Valley and to Siwa. Those enroute to Siwa cross the northwest coast and often spend a night or two in Marsa Matruh. Generally, these tourists have more contact with a wider spectrum of "ordinary" Egyptians than is the case with tourists on organized package tours. However, despite the importance of foreign tourism in Egypt, the vast majority of Egyptians have no direct contact with foreign tourists.

Arab Tourism

Arab tourism is a more recent phenomenon in Egypt than foreign tourism. Travelers from other parts of the Arab world have, of course, visited Egypt for more than 1,400 years. North African Arabs came, and continue to come, as pilgrims on their ways to and from Makka and Madina in the Hijaz. North Africans and people from the Arab East have also long traveled to Egypt for study, for trade and other business purposes, and for political reasons. Visits for leisure-time activities existed on a modest scale in the 1920s and 1930s, as some Lebanese, Syrian, and Iraqi elite families journeyed to Cairo and Alexandria. Some elite families from Saudi Arabia visited Egypt as tourists in the 1940s. However, numerically significant Arab tourism to Egypt began in the 1960s. Since then, this tourism has grown rapidly in importance.

The first Arab tourists to come in significant numbers were Libyans, following the development of Libya's oil-based economy. They came to Marsa Matruh, but Alexandria was their main destination, followed by Cairo. Deteriorating political relations between Egypt and Libya and the closing of the border in the early 1970s curtailed Libyan tourism in Egypt until the late 1980s, when relations improved and the border was reopened. Relations between Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula oil-producing countries were sour throughout most of the 1950s and 1960s. Tourists from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Arab Gulf countries especially traveled to Lebanon for holidays from the 1950s until the mid-1970s, when the Lebanese civil war brought an end to Arabian tourism in Lebanon. Meanwhile, relations between Egypt and the Arabian oil-producing countries began to improve in the early 1970s. Arabian tourists started to flock to Egypt in about 1975 and have continued to come in large numbers. Many Lebanese, forced into

leisure by their civil war, also came to Cairo in large numbers for several years in the late 1970s. Likewise, many Kuwaitis weathered out Desert Storm as tourists in Cairo in 1990 and 1991. Although people from other Arab countries visit Egypt as tourists, the largest numbers now come from Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait and other Arabian Gulf countries.

These Arab tourists do not come on organized package tours but as individuals or families. Except for the Libyans and a few who come on ferries across the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aqaba, these tourists travel to Egypt by airplane and arrive at Cairo International Airport. They typically arrange their own transportation into the city and many go to the same five- and four-star hotels that provide lodging for foreign tourists. However, some go to smaller hotels and many rent furnished apartments from individual Egyptians. Some own apartments in Cairo or elsewhere in Egypt and stay there.

Arab tourists include many young men and some not so young men who travel as individuals or, more commonly, with a group of friends and/or relatives. However, many Arab families also come to Egypt, and large numbers of Arab women travel within this context. Arab tourists especially visit Egypt during school vacations in mid-winter and in the summer and, to a lesser degree, at the Muslim feasts of '*Id al-Fitr* and '*Id al-'Adha*. For all of them, visiting Egypt is thought of as a holiday. Going to ancient Egyptian sites is not a priority for these tourists. They rarely travel to Upper Egypt and seldom visit the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. They often go to the pyramids at Giza, but the main attraction is horseback-riding and having a good time rather than sightseeing.

The unattached men have a bad reputation in Egypt as coming mainly for alcohol and sex and, to a lesser degree, gambling. Many indulge in these activities or hope to, but their visits are not totally motivated by these considerations. Many Arab men and women enjoy going to the theater and to the cinema, to see floor shows at respectable night clubs, and to eat in fine restaurants. The women especially enjoy shopping and also entertain themselves in gatherings at open-air *kasinoħat*, "casinos"; "cafes," on the Nile and at hotels and other touristic establishments. Greenery and the River Nile are special attractions for Arab tourists, male and female, and they enjoy visiting gardens—for example, the large gardens at the Nile barrages just north of Cairo.

The relative freedom that Egypt affords for both genders to amble around in public is also an attraction. They stroll through the lobbies and hallways of the major hotels and sometimes throng large boulevards—for example, Arab League Street in the Muhandisin section of Giza. This boulevard has numerous stands and kiosks that sell hamburgers, pizzas, ice cream,

soft drinks, and so on. A brisk business flourishes here; and at the height of the Arab tourist season, this boulevard is informally dubbed al-Wazir Street, after the old main street of Riyadh.

Cairo was, and continues to be, the main destination for tourists from Arabia. However, they have discovered Alexandria, which continues to be the main destination for Libyans. Arabian tourists also now visit resorts that have been developed on the Suez Canal, such as Fayid between Isma'iliya and Suez. A few go to the Red Sea and Sinai resorts, but this is not yet common. Some also go to Marsa Matruh and to new tourist villages on the northwest coast. Thus Arab tourism in Egypt is expanding its scope. Egypt is firmly established as a main destination for both Arabian and Libyan tourists. However, as indicated above, Arab tourism has been subject to political events in the region, which is also the case for foreign tourism. Moreover, Egypt has competitors for the Arab tourist market, and the number of Arab visitors has declined from 1,103,000 in 1992 to 897,000 in 1996 (*ibid*). Many Arabian tourists now stop over in Egypt for a brief visit before going to their main holiday destination in Europe. Turkey and Morocco have become important competitors for Arabians who formerly came to Egypt. A revitalized tourist industry in Lebanon will undoubtedly attract many. Also, resort areas recently developed in Arabia—for example, in the highlands of Asir in southwestern Saudi Arabia—are becoming popular holiday destinations for many Arabian families.

Moreover, some Arabian visitors to Sinai and to the northwest coast have been the subject of a controversy that has attracted considerable press attention in Egypt in the early and mid-1990s. Some Arabian men go on desert safaris and camp at interior sites in the Sinai and northwest coast deserts. They are said to engage in hunting gazelles and other protected species. Allegedly, high-ranking Egyptian officials have improperly waived or purposely failed to enforce Egyptian laws and regulations that prohibit hunting of protected or endangered species. To some degree, this controversy reflects a genuine concern by some for environmental issues. The controversy, as it has played out in the press, can also be said to have provided some opposition figures with an excuse to criticize the government. However, at a subtle level, the controversy reflects Egyptian resentment against Arab tourists, who are the subject of envy because of their money and who are perceived to flaunt, sometimes arrogantly, what Egyptians consider to be proper norms of behavior. Nonetheless, Arab tourism, like that of foreigners, takes place on a large-scale without major mishap. Arab tourists have much greater contact with "ordinary" Egyptians than the foreign tourists. Arab tourists also spend much more money in the local economy than is the case with foreign tourists.

Local Holiday-Making

Egyptians, themselves, increasingly engage in tourism abroad. However, Egyptians and non-Egyptian residents of the country who travel for leisure-time activities within Egypt are not considered to be tourists but holiday-makers.

The majority of Egyptians, villagers and low-income urban dwellers, do not go on holidays to some other location. Many Muslims from among the majority do travel, however, to other places to attend a *mulid*, "festival," that commemorates the birth of a revered Muslim or to pray at certain mosques, such as the al-Husain mosque in Cairo, during Ramadan. If resident in Cairo or another city, many also travel to their villages or, for some of the upper class, to their 'izab, "farms;" "estates," for the Muslim feasts and/or the Egyptian spring festival of *Shamm an-Nasim*. Moreover, Coptic Egyptians increasingly embark on trips to visit Christian monasteries and shrines in various parts of Egypt.

However, holiday-making in Egypt almost exclusively means going to the seashore. A very few, mainly some of the Westernized elites, have recently gone on holidays to Upper Egypt; but ancient Egyptian ruins attract very few Egyptians, although some visit them in the context of school trips. A very few, almost all young people, have begun to go on desert safaris in Sinai. Yet the sea has no serious competitors for Egyptians on holiday in their own country. Extended summer holidays on the Mediterranean date back at least to the beginning of the twentieth century for many of Cairo's elites. Alexandria was the destination of choice, but Ras al-Bar near Dumiyat and other sites on the deltaic coast also attracted vacationers.

Since its inception early in the century, holiday-making has grown enormously in Egypt. It especially expanded during the 1950s and 1960s with strong state support for students, workers, and government employees to spend a summer holiday on the seashore. Since the early 1980s, local holiday-making has boomed and is no longer limited to the summer. Although vastly expanded in scope, some features of the early elite holiday-making continue to exist today. One of these features is the family orientation of most Egyptian holiday-making. Another is the predominance of Cairenes among holiday-makers.

The elites who summered in Alexandria and other north coast communities traveled as families from Cairo, usually accompanied by some or most of their servants. They settled in a *fila*, "villa"; "house," or apartment that usually belonged to the family. The women and children spent most or all of the summer on the coast, but the adult men traveled back to Cairo to tend to business or other activities and then visited their families for shorter or

longer stays as other duties allowed. Although no longer limited to Alexandria and other old communities of the deltaic coast, this pattern still predominates among families from higher income levels and is the ideal that almost all would like to achieve. Some families now own palatial summer residences on the seashore. More own smaller villas or chalets and many own an apartment. A servant may accompany the family; and the men still commute back and forth to Cairo. However, for the majority who cannot afford to own a second residence, a main alternative is to rent an apartment, usually for a short stay of about ten to twenty days. In such cases, the husband is usually also on vacation with his family and does not commute back to Cairo.

For people employed by the government, public sector companies, and some large private companies, cheaper arrangements are usually possible through employer-sponsored holidays that include lodging in apartment buildings owned or leased by the employer or in hotels where the employer negotiates a special group discount. For others, the holiday may be spent in a tent in a camp on the seashore.

Today, all but the disadvantaged poor of Cairo consider a summer holiday on the seashore to be a basic necessity, almost a fundamental right. To not be able to go on holiday, if only for a few days, would be a calamity for several million Cairenes, from the upper-lower and lower-middle classes to the super-rich and the president of the republic. Cairo's masses flood into Alexandria, Marsa Matruh, 'Arish, Ras al-Bar, and other places on the Mediterranean from about the middle of July until the end of August. Meanwhile, residents of Alexandria attempt to escape what many of them consider the unruly hordes from Cairo and go to other places on the Mediterranean for a holiday. Increasingly, middle class people from Tanta, Mansura, and other provincial cities also join in the summer holiday ritual.

Marsa Matruh

The tourist scene in Marsa Matruh at first glance seems to be a world apart from foreign tourism to the monuments of ancient Egypt and from Arab tourism focused on the cosmopolitan attractions of Cairo and Alexandria. With no ancient monuments, sightseeing in and around Marsa Matruh consists of looking at the sea and a small inlet from a promontory west of town at 'Ajiba, a natural formation on the coast known as Cleopatra's *hammam*, "bath," and the cave where German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel had his headquarters for a few months during the Second World War. Marsa Matruh

also has a small cultural museum and a tiny park but no "oriental" bazaar—just a mundane market where the most famous product for sale is *lib*, or roasted watermelon seeds.

No fine or especially good restaurants exist, although one can occasionally eat excellent grilled *waqar*, "seabass," at a small "Bedouin-style" cafe where the young owner/cook describes himself as "half half"—both Bedouin and urbanite. A couple of small restaurants serve good kebab prepared from the region's Barki sheep. Several hotels have restaurants where one can enjoy good food in a pleasant ambience but no fine cuisine and seldom any fish. Although Marsa Matruh is a seaport and a couple of places cook fish for take-away, most of the town's fish is brought in from Alexandria. Three or four hotels have small discos and bars, and one can enjoy a glass of Egypt's Stella beer or a soft drink served with an hors d'oeuvre of pickled olives from Siwa as he or she sits at Marsa Matruh's only hotel located directly on the beach.

The anthropologists sitting in the hotel's combined lobby, bar, and disco area enjoy a spectacular sunset across Marsa Matruh's bay and the Shatt al-Gharam made famous in the Arab world by Laila Murad's movie of the 1950s. However, they especially enjoy some of the chance meetings that take place there: for examples, a descendant of Sanusi notables and his entourage of young followers from a far-flung but now distant past; a well-known Egyptian film director and the actors and artistic members of his crew; two young German graduate students on their way for yet another anthropological study of the Awlad 'Ali; and the son of a wealthy Bedouin *'umda* drinking whiskey. They also observe streams of middle and upper-middle class Cairene families on their ways to and from the hotel's thatched-roof dining area and watch a group of graduating seniors from the American University in Cairo noisily line up and perform their own private graduation march.

They cringe when they see colleagues accompanying the students as chaperons or taking advantage of the special rate the AUC Student Union negotiates for the trip. Serious people—engineers, economists, and English writing teachers—the anthropologists rightly think that these colleagues will wrongly conclude that they are not conducting research. Yet tourism has become the world's largest industry, and a growing body of social science research explores the multifaceted aspects of a phenomenon that has expanded vastly throughout most of the world since the end of the Second World War (see, for examples, Nash 1981; Graburn 1983, 1991; Cohen 1984; Dann, Nash, and Pearce 1988; Smith 1992; Williams and Shaw 1992). Moreover, Marsa Matruh's tourism has evolved throughout much of the twentieth century and is a fundamental part of the town's transformation.

Early Tourism Scenes

Marsa Matruh was the exclusive site of early holiday-making on the north-west coast, although Egypt's King Farouk—deposed in 1952—maintained a royal *istaraha*, "resthouse," at Ras al-Hikma, where a presidential mansion has recently been built. Several small hotels were established in Marsa Matruh by Greeks during the early part of the twentieth century. The Lido, a government-owned hotel leased to a Greek manager, flourished during the 1940s and 1950s. According to the founder—in the late 1950s—of what has become Marsa Matruh's best-known hotel, the Beau Site,

Churchill came to [Marsa] Matruh and stayed at the Lido. The pashas always stayed at the Lido. Many pashas. Nasha'at Pasha, the aristocracy of Egypt, people in the *bursa* ["stock exchange"]. Marsa Matruh had a special clientele, people who owned their own automobiles. Ambassadors. Many Syrians, Greeks, Italians. A lot of people of this style, of this mentality. Besides the Lido, there were four or five other hotels—the Rose, the Miami, the Riviera. There were two or three Greek restaurants—Yotis, Barakat. High class people came here during the 1950s. They came until the 1970s.

Early tourism development in Marsa Matruh was hardly the result of local initiatives but was an extension of the tourism sector in the Nile Valley, especially that of Alexandria. For example, the Riviera belonged to a Greek who owned and managed a hotel in Alexandria. The man who later founded the Beau Site first ventured to Marsa Matruh from Alexandria with a small tour he had organized there and, to accommodate his group, entered a partnership with the son of the Riviera's owner. He became the manager of that hotel and contracted in 1957 with an airline, which made an overnight stop in Marsa Matruh on flights between South Africa and London, for its passengers and crew to stay at the Riviera. However, "There were no cooks at the Riviera, nothing. So, I arranged with the Greek owner of a restaurant in Alexandria to take on the kitchen at the Riviera. And we brought everything from our home [in Cairo], glasses and plates." Furthermore, the waiters at the Lido and at the Beau Site, when it first opened, were from "the waiters who worked in Upper Egypt during the winter."

Reliance on hotel workers from outside the region is also indicated by a Son of the Nile Valley from Marsa Matruh who is now the manager of one of the city's larger new hotels. He recalls that as a boy he took a job at the Beau Site and that in the mid-1960s, when he was 16, he was promoted to a "service" position greeting and waiting on the guests. As he remembers,

I was the only one from all of Matruh to have such a position. All the other staff members were held by students from foreign language schools in Cairo. They were chosen because they knew foreign languages. But all of us were amateurs.

We were also an indiscriminate mix of Muslims and Christians. Later on, many of the workers there became professional hotel and restaurant workers. Back then, the hotel business was a profession for *wulad an-nas* [“sons of people;” “people of high standing”].

Although now much expanded and significantly transformed, the early development of the Beau Site provides a case of the small-scale characteristics and amateurism that prevailed in Marsa Matruh’s early touristic establishments. The founder of that hotel and its manager until his retirement a few years back is thought by many Egyptians to be Greek. His mother was Greek, but his father’s family had origins in Arab Palestine. He pointedly says, “I am from Asiyut, from Upper Egypt.”

Recounting his past, he told us that he moved from Asiyut to Cairo in the early 1950s after his father died and he had married. He took a job “with a small salary” in the Heliopolis company in Cairo but says he “always liked having a good time and wanted to make a bit of money.” In order to meet both goals, he decided to rent a bus and began to organize tours to Alexandria for Cairenes who wanted to go to the horse races there. Eventually, he organized a group of people to visit Marsa Matruh. He said, “The road was very bad and I thought I had made a mistake.” But he decided to stay on in Marsa Matruh, and “when my wife heard this, she cried. My mother cried.” After a short while in Marsa Matruh, he concluded that a good potential for business existed and decided “to make a hotel of my own here.” He says he found a building to rent and told the governor of his plans. However, the governor told him,

“I will give you an address to see another place.” And I came here to this site [where the Beau Site is located]. It was in the desert. Outside of town. The *dair* [“convent”] was here; but no sisters were in it. No other buildings anywhere near. I said, “I will take it, but I have already made a contract with someone else.” He said, “I will cancel that contract for you.”

This place, the old building we still have, belonged to a big *liwa'* [“general”] in Matruh, and he brought prisoners to paint it. There used to be no *bakuma* [“government”] here in the desert. No governorate until after the Revolution. The *liwa'* was Sudanese, and he was the head of the border guards. And the head of the border guards used to be the governor. I remem-

ber that I made a contract for ten years with the *liwa'*. That was in 1956. I rented the place to make it into a hotel. Having a contract in those days was like owning a place. The *qanun* ["law"] is that they cannot evict me. So, I have a contract for this place. The son of the *liwa'* lives here in [Marsa] Matruh.

The Lido had about twenty-two rooms. We had fifteen rooms at the Beau Site. People began to come. They were high class people, but of a certain mentality who wanted to be by the sea. In a kind of primitive setting. Business was good until 1967, when it was forbidden for foreigners to enter Matruh because Hosni Mubarak and all the pilots were training here. Restrictions on foreigners continued until 1975. Of course, Egyptians were not restricted; but many of them stopped coming. Now, everything has changed a lot.

The manager of another hotel in Marsa Matruh who grew up in the city recalls that the Beau Site's first "regular clients were Christians, especially a lot of Lebanese." He also said,

The food and service were excellent, and the secret of their excellence was the attention of the owner, for whom the hotel business was not just a business but also a hobby that he loved. He was serene, pleasant, and easily loved. But he also taught the profession to the workers. He made them love the profession.

Bujra (1967:A-9) lists twelve hotels in Marsa Matruh in 1966: the Beau Site, Rio, Lido, Palace, Riviera, Miami, De Rose, Rim, Qattariya, Cleopatra, Ramsis, and Zephir. Figures he compiled from ministry of tourism data for the first six of these hotels and data collected in the field for the next two indicate a total of 6,377 registered guests during June, July, and August 1966. Hotels with the largest number of customers were the Riviera and the Beau Site where stays averaged about three nights and six nights, respectively. Bujra (*ibid*:A-8) further records that 39,256 people arrived in Marsa Matruh by train from June through August, with a high of 18,758 in August. He estimates that about twenty-five hundred arrived by express bus and another seven hundred by airplane. Based on his census of automobiles entering Marsa Matruh between July 15th and August 15th, calculations suggest that about eight thousand came by car from the Nile Valley and about ten thousand from Libya. Thus a total of about sixty thousand people arrived in Marsa Matruh from June through August. Another ten thousand or so arrived in September.

The reader will remember that Marsa Matruh had a population of 11,477 in 1966. Some of the sixty thousand summer arrivals would have been local residents returning home from business trips or study outside of the city. Some of the arrivals also would have included people coming to Marsa Matruh for business. However, the majority must have been holiday-makers, and their numbers surely exceeded the 6,377 registered in hotels. A few would have stayed in the four hotels for which Bujra does not provide data; however, these were very small hotels. Some probably stayed in private residences and were thus not formally registered, as now occurs on a large-scale when visitors rent furnished apartments. However, many of the holiday-makers in the summer of 1966 would have stayed in tourist camps, which probably accounts for most of those not registered in hotels.

Marsa Matruh is famous in Egypt for its tourist camps established by various national universities, the country's main sports clubs, and some public sector enterprises. Largely a result of changes introduced by the 1952 Revolution, the camps consist of white canvas tents pitched in straight rows on various sections of the beach, along with permanent facilities such as showers, toilets, kitchens, dining halls, and recreational centers. Although tents have recently been replaced by permanent structures in many cases, the camps have provided inexpensive and usually subsidized summer holidays for personnel from the various institutions since around 1960.

University students from non-elite backgrounds and public sector workers and employees have especially benefited from these camps. Back in the 1960s, the camps provided young students and workers with their first experience of a summer holiday away from home and, often, their first taste of the sea. Traveling to Marsa Matruh was also a great adventure for these Sons of the Nile Valley, as they journeyed for the first time ever across the desert and saw a part of their country they had never known before.

A trip to Marsa Matruh may still provide visitors with their first view of the desert beyond the Cairo-Alexandria "desert" highway; but, by now, many of the people who stay in camps are long accustomed to summer holidays on the sea. Marsa Matruh's camps played a major role in opening up Egypt's summer holiday scene to people other than the privileged elites. Accordingly, the camps brought to Marsa Matruh a *sha'abi*, "popular," class of holiday-maker that added social diversity to the city's more elite tourism scene centered in hotels. Although generally welcomed in Marsa Matruh, the lower class holiday-makers are now resented by some hotel owners and managers who complain that they have minimal amounts of disposable cash to spend. As one hotel manager put it, "they bring quantity but no quality to Marsa Matruh."

The New Hotels

Marsa Matruh's hotels have increased to a total of fifty-four, and the number of furnished flats available for rent has skyrocketed. Many new buildings have been constructed since around 1980, and the physical character of the city has altered significantly. Some of the local people lament the change. A Son of the Nile Valley from among the city's old migrant settlers said, for example,

We should have left Marsa Matruh as it was. The camps with all the tents were really attractive. The people who stayed there enjoyed the tents. They were a change from the apartments and buildings they lived in. But we built all these new buildings. Apartment buildings, tall hotels. They are very near or right on the beach and they are not in the interest of tourism. We have beautiful sands, a beautiful beach. The area by the sea should have been left unspoiled. The new buildings block people from reaching the sea. The local people now have no access at all to the beach.

An owner and manager of an older hotel that has recently completed its own major expansion complained that the construction of new hotels and apartment buildings had taken place without planning. Also, "There was a degree of shoddiness in their construction. The buildings are so varied, no general aesthetic." However, he noted that since about 1980, "local contractors and a lot of local workers" had benefited from the city's construction boom.

Sixteen of Marsa Matruh's fifty-four hotels are registered with the ministry of tourism, which maintains a regional office in the Matruh governorate building. The remaining thirty-eight hotels are "*sha'abi* hotels," according to the director of the tourism office. Twenty-four of these hotels are owned by local people, including Bedouin, Sons of the Nile Valley, and a couple of Greeks; the remaining fourteen are owned by people resident in the Nile Valley. Many of these hotels have about forty rooms, but some are smaller and several have more than a hundred rooms. They provide inexpensive lodging, with 1990 posted prices for a single room with bath ranging from LE 2.80 to LE 6.75. Rooms without a bath are even cheaper. They cater to low-income tourists and holiday-makers but also house workers, traders, and transients who pass through the city on trips not related to tourism or holiday-making. Moreover, these hotels usually have few workers, none of whom have formal training in tourism or hotel work.

For the purposes of analysis, we find it useful to designate the so-called "*sha'abi* hotels" as part of the semiformal tourism sector. Small-scale enterprises, these hotels are registered with the Marsa Matruh city council and the

governorate. However, they are not subject to supervision and regulation by the ministry of tourism and do not figure in the ministry's tourism development plans. Guests staying in these hotels are registered with the authorities but are not included in ministry of tourism statistics on the number of visitors who stayed in hotels. By contrast, Marsa Matruh's sixteen hotels registered with the ministry of tourism clearly form part of Egypt's formal tourism sector, although most engage in practices that one might well deem informal—especially the recruitment of seasonal workers.

According to classifications provided us by the director of the tourism office, Marsa Matruh had five two-star hotels, eight three-star hotels, one four-star hotel, and two in the process of opening and not yet classified in 1994. Five of these are relatively old establishments of which one, the Riviera, has undergone major renovation and upgrading and another, the Beau Site, has been expanded greatly since the late 1980s. The other eleven hotels are new enterprises, the oldest of which is the Rommel House which started up in 1980. Two of these hotels are owned by the governorate of Matruh, while seven are owned by local Bedouin and Sons of the Nile Valley and five by people from outside of the northwest coast. Most of these hotels are moderate in size, with 100 to 150 rooms or so, but several are somewhat larger and have more than 200 rooms. Accommodations are much more costly than in the *sha'abi* hotels, with 1990 posted rates for a single room with bath ranging from LE 13.80 in a two-star hotel to between LE 45.00 and LE 68.50 in three-star hotels. In addition, half-board is usually required during the summer season.

The Hotel Business

Interviews conducted in 1990 with hotel owners, managers, and workers (Sherbiny, Cole, and Girgis 1992) combined with our research in 1994 indicate that the construction of new hotels and the renovation and expansion of older ones was encouraged by the state through exemptions from customs duties on imported equipment and materials. New hotels in "remote areas" such as Marsa Matruh further benefit from a ten-year exemption from taxes. Construction costs of hotels built by people from the northwest coast are said to have ranged between one and a half and seven million Egyptian pounds. Financing was mainly from savings, supplemented by bank loans said to have been arranged without difficulty. Most of the projects proceeded in stages, thus construction costs were partly covered by income derived from operations initiated before final completion of the projects. Concerning the expansion of the Beau Site, the hotel's current manager—the half brother of its founder—said,

We financed the new buildings with loans from banks. What was a bit of a problem for us is that most of our income comes during two months only. So, we had to take loans and we had to proceed gradually, step by step. We did not want to close down. And we built another 150 rooms in steps. This expansion took place over eight years.

The manager of one of the new hotels said construction of the ground floor for services and two floors of rooms started in 1984 and was completed in 1986. Several more floors of rooms were added on by 1988. He said construction had taken less time than expected because liquidity, construction materials, and workers were available, but "the workers were not skilled." In another case, the owner said that he himself was the contractor for the building and had supervised its construction without problems or delays starting in 1984. The owner of a third hotel, however, said his project started in 1986 and had taken longer than expected because of "poor labor conditions" and inflation in the cost of building materials. This hotel is one of Marsa Matruh's larger new hotels and has a basement, two floors for services, and seven floors with 134 rooms and fourteen suites. The owner said in 1990 that he planned to add three more floors and a rooftop area for social activities.

The construction of hotels by investors from within the regional community indicates the accumulation of considerable capital in the cases of some local people. The first main new hotel is owned by a family from the Jumi'at Bedouin with a long background in trade, including major involvement in the export of livestock first to Libya and now to Arabia. This family also owns one of Marsa Matruh's major pharmacies. Another of the new hotels is owned by one of the region's main livestock exporters, also from the Jumi'at. A third hotel was built by a man of Libyan origin raised in Marsa Matruh. He said his father is a merchant and that he had worked with him in commerce, contracting, and tourism—as his father owns one of Marsa Matruh's largest *sha'abi* hotels. We were told by others that this man has also had a lucrative career as a commercial agent for a large foreign firm. A physician born in Suhaj in Upper Egypt but long settled in Marsa Matruh is the owner of a fourth new hotel. Meanwhile, we were told that the local owner of a hotel still in the process of opening in 1994 is a man who has long owned an automobile dealership, especially for the sale of pick-up trucks in the region. Owners of new hotels from outside of the northwest coast include a man from Alexandria who also owns hotels there and a large contracting company based in Cairo.

Local entrepreneurs who have invested in new hotels, with one exception, have no previous experience in the tourism business, and motives given for why they invested in this activity were varied. The manager of one of the

hotels, a man from the Nile Valley, said, "The owner [from the Jumi'at] wanted to copy a relative. This is a feature of the Bedouin. If they find someone who succeeds, they copy him." Other reasons given were more altruistic: "to encourage tourism for the development of Matruh" and "because Marsa Matruh has no hotel other than the Beau Site for the quality customer." However, one of the owners said he was worried about the future of his investment because "I thought that more customers would come," a clear and not surprising indication of the centrality of profit motives.

The manager of the Beau Site mentioned an additional factor which influenced his family's decision to expand their hotel. He said,

We had to expand because of all the new development taking place in the eighties. Around us new hotels were already built, big hotels that made us look like a very small enterprise. Hotels like the Rommel House and Radi. They built in a new style, with new building materials, oil-based paint, new equipment, air-conditioning. Maybe our old style was more "appropriate," but it was out of fashion. So, we changed from a small hotel run by family members to a bigger establishment, also run by the family. We had to change to meet the expanding demands and the new style.

Hotel owners and managers invariably say that feasibility studies were conducted before constructing or expanding the hotels. They, along with almost all of the workers interviewed, strongly affirm that feasibility studies are a *sine qua non* for success in the tourism field. However, one hotel manager said the investors did not make "proper feasibility studies" but looked around and "saw the streets full of people in summer and thought a hotel would make good money." He further says that the investors mainly copied each other, built in a rush, and tried to outdo their rivals. The result, in his opinion, is an oversupply of hotel rooms that seriously affects occupancy rates and depresses the prices hotels can charge. He says the hotel he manages did very good business and had full occupancy in summer and good occupancy rates in winter until about 1986 or 1987, when competition from other new hotels and from furnished apartments seriously affected the number of visitors the hotel could attract.

Many of the hotel owners and managers blame low occupancy rates on lack of effective marketing outside of the region. Some blame the governorate and the tourism ministry for failure to advertize the area abroad. According to one hotel owner, "Foreigners only know about Luxor, Aswan, and the Red Sea. They do not know about the Mediterranean shores of Egypt. And the authorities have done nothing to introduce this area to foreign tourists." However, one hotel owner acknowledged that marketing

should be the responsibility of the private enterprises and not that of the state, especially in the case of Egyptian holiday-makers. Nonetheless, he alleged that "we Egyptians are weak in marketing. We always want to make a quick buck." The owner of one of the more successful hotels does have excellent marketing within Egypt and maintains an office in Cairo for this part of the business. This man suggests that other hotel owners and managers who complain about low occupancy do not know how to sell their services. Commenting on his own approach, he said, "The important thing is to get the holiday-maker into the hotel. Even if he does not stay here, we get him to spend. It depends on how clever I am; we create ways for people to spend."

Other factors also affect occupancy rates. One major problem is a very short holiday season in summer. The weather in Marsa Matruh is usually excellent from about the end of April until early October. Indeed, some consider that May and September are the best months for enjoying the area's beaches. However, the visits of most Egyptian holiday-makers are limited to the school summer holiday period. During the past few years, summer holidays have become shorter, as exams are scheduled later and later by the ministry of education. As one hotel owner complained,

In the past, when we made our plans, our schedule, we used to think of seventy-five days, then sixty days. Now, we have to say fifty days. This also applies to other summer resorts in Egypt. We all begin about the middle of July. To be exact, the first day after the general secondary exam. School exams determine the beginning of the summer season. The season ends, of course, on the eve of the first day of classes. We notice this in our hotel. On that day, occupancy falls from 80 percent to 20 percent.

Our observations indicate that most of the hotels appear to do good business during the short summer season. However, guests that fill up some of the hotels are public sector employees enjoying an inexpensive summer holiday organized and often subsidized by their companies. Company officials come to Marsa Matruh in winter and early spring and negotiate with hotel owners and managers for special discounts. In some cases, a company rents a whole hotel for its employees. Most hotel owners and managers say these arrangements result in quantity without quality, as in the case of the summer camps. They suggest that large numbers of poor guests spend little and drive away "quality" guests, defined as people with high incomes who have plenty of money to spend.

Hotel owners, managers, and workers note other problems that confront the hotels. The high cost of water and its irregular and inadequate supply

was a major complaint in 1990, when Nile water piped to Marsa Matruh was still distributed within the city by tanker. Completion of a municipal network of pipes has somewhat eased the water supply problem. Electricity remains a major problem, since "the current is weak, which affects all sorts of equipment, and we have many blackouts in summer." The inadequate supply of provisions in the local market is also seen as a drawback by some. For example, "Provisions available in Marsa Matruh are not up to the required standards. We have to go to Alexandria, even for vegetables. There is no veal here; but we have plenty of chicken."

Others mentioned an inadequate local supply of good quality bread, no local supplier of coffee, the need to bring all equipment and furnishings from Alexandria and Cairo, and few trained workers in the community to maintain and repair equipment. However, the current manager of the Beau Site drew on his long experience in Marsa Matruh to compare the past with the present, and said,

Way back, my mother used to send the meat from Cairo, because there was no good meat available in Marsa Matruh. She froze it at home and in the neighbors' refrigerators and sent it by airplane. Now, I buy all the meat here in Marsa Matruh. I buy almost everything here, and not from Cairo as in the past.

Hotel Workers

He also said that he used to bring all his employees from outside of the northwest coast, but "now, I depend on [Marsa] Matruh for most of our workers, especially because of their housing." The owner of another large hotel said 60 percent of his workers are from the area. However, some of the other hotels hire relatively few workers from Marsa Matruh—about 40 percent in one case, 25 percent in another, and less than 10 percent in a third. People of both genders work in all of the larger hotels. Women make up about 18 percent of the staff in one hotel, 30 percent in another, and 34 percent in a third. Workers in *sha'abi* hotels are relatively few and, except for a few cases, are men.

Owners and managers of the larger hotels reported summer staffs of between about sixty and 130 employees in 1990. Four years later we were told that the summer staff in one of the hotels exceeded 250. The number of workers falls dramatically when the summer season is over. The manager of one hotel reported a drop of about 50 percent, but most of the hotels employ very few workers outside the summer season. Many of Marsa Matruh's hotels formerly closed during fall, winter, and spring. Most now remain

open throughout the year but reduce operations to a bare minimum during the long off-season.

Staff that remain throughout the year, in most cases, are permanent employees and have formal contracts that conform with regulations stipulated in Egypt's national labor codes. Some of these staff members have accumulated increasingly long years of service, and a few have achieved significant promotions in their job categories. However, the hiring of seasonal workers tends to be relatively informal. The Matruh governorate headquarters of the National Democratic Party does arrange the deployment of students from secondary schools in Marsa Matruh to work in the larger hotels during the summer. The ministry of labor may also send lists of workers to be hired. However, the manager of one hotel said, "The labor office gives me a headache because I am supposed to take their permission for each worker I hire." He said that he actually selects most of the workers through personal contacts.

Other hotel owners and managers confirm informal recruitment of most of the seasonal workers. According to one owner, "We choose most new workers on the basis of contacts they have with our present workers. The workers themselves bring other workers." This approach to hiring was echoed by another hotel owner who said, "We select some who just walk in and apply for a job. Then, they bring others whom they know. Of course, we interview all of them." Many of the summer workers are university students, mainly from Alexandria and other towns in the Nile delta. They travel to Marsa Matruh in late May and early June and go from hotel to hotel seeking work.

Workers without residences in Marsa Matruh are provided lodging by the hotels, and all of the workers are provided meals. However, their pay is often minimal. For example, the sixteen-year-old son of a man we know well from the Awlad 'Ali worked in one of the more prestigious hotels in the summer of 1993. His total earnings for three month's work were just enough to buy a new pair of trousers and a new shirt but not enough for a new pair of shoes, socks, and a belt to complete the outfit. He mainly mopped floors; but the boy said he enjoyed the experience, and his Bedouin father thought it worthwhile for him to see another way of life and perhaps practice his English with foreigners. Of course, some of the workers, especially those in service positions, are able to benefit considerably from tips.

Nonrandom interviews in 1990 with twenty workers in five hotels indicate that workers complain about low salaries but are nonetheless happy to have a job. Most mentioned that working conditions are satisfactory and they tended to say that they are well treated by management. However, in one case, workers reported that the hotel owner was unfriendly and difficult

to work for—a phenomenon perhaps confirmed by the owner himself, a retired cotton broker from Alexandria, who said,

I have a problem with workers. They are unskilled and they do not observe work schedules. Sometimes, they commit themselves for the whole season and then leave two or three weeks later. It becomes difficult to replace them, because other students who came with them have already taken jobs elsewhere. I do not hire people from here, very few. The Arabs are not suitable to work in hotels.

Despite his prejudice against Bedouin, many local people in Marsa Matruh would agree with his evaluation. According to one of the city's residents, "The hotels need labor with a certain expertise, and that is why they hire people from other places. The only advantage people from Marsa Matruh have is that they live here."

The more skilled workers in hotels are often recruited from among graduates of hotel and tourism training institutes in Alexandria or Cairo. However, many of the students and others who wander in from the Nile Valley looking for summer jobs are hardly more skilled than people from Marsa Matruh with similar educational backgrounds.

One of the hotels now trains its own workers, most of whom are from Marsa Matruh, in formal sessions regularly scheduled for about an hour and a half in the afternoons. Although a high rate of turnover exists, growing numbers of seasonal workers from Marsa Matruh return to the same hotel each year and develop their skills through on-the-job learning. Thus, some of the larger hotels are gradually acquiring a more skilled and regular work force. Still, informal hiring practices remain. Indeed, one hotel owner admitted that he does not pay his share of the workers' social insurance as officially required, and said many of his workers complain about this.

Furnished Flats

Owners and managers of the larger hotels complain about other issues. They resent the setting of prices for rooms, meals, and drinks by the ministry of tourism. However, their greatest ire is directed against the proliferation of furnished apartments in Marsa Matruh. Some apartment buildings have been constructed by public sector companies and other institutions for the exclusive and regular use of their own employees. Many privately owned apartments also exist for rent to holiday-makers. These private apartments are major competitors to the hotels and are also the epitome of Egypt's informal tourism sector.

When one arrives in Marsa Matruh by car from, say, Cairo or Alexandria, he or she descends from the plateau and has to slow down to cross the railroad tracks. A small traffic circle is just across the tracks; and, in summer, several boys hang out there and shout "*shaqa mafrusha!*", "furnished flat!", at every car that does not have Matruh license plates. Driving around town, and especially on the corniche, one will hear the same shout from numerous boys and men. Each of these people knows of apartments for rent, or he will take the holiday-maker to an informal agent who will show the person several different apartments.

Alternatively, a holiday-maker can check the classified ads in a national newspaper, call up an owner or agent in Cairo, Alexandria, or Marsa Matruh, and make arrangements to rent an apartment before departing for the holiday.

We visited a wide range of these apartments and found that most of them are relatively new, having been built since about 1980. Some are in a large state-subsidized housing development originally intended as residences for government employees of *dakhl al-mahdud*, "limited income." However, few of the employees could afford these apartments, and they were purchased by an assortment of military officers serving in the area, individuals from Cairo and Alexandria, and a few local people.

Somewhat more luxurious apartment buildings have been constructed in the Lux area near the beach. Private investors from the northwest coast, but especially from Cairo and Alexandria, own apartments in these buildings. Other apartments available for rent are scattered around town. We found most of the apartments at least a bid shoddy, even in the Lux area, but that may reflect our own peculiar tastes. Nonetheless, many holiday-makers find them to be a bargain, as a Son of the Nile Valley explained:

The flat owner may charge what appear to be high rates. But the flats are shared by many people, sometimes more than one family in a flat—maybe up to twenty people. If they pay 200 pounds per day for a two bedroom flat and they are twenty people, its cheap. Ten pounds per person a day. If they spend 20 pounds a day per person for food, they will be getting a good deal.

Room and full-board in a hotel will be much more expensive. If a man brings his family and children for four or five days to, say, the Beau Site, he may spend five to six thousand pounds. A family of five will take one double room and one triple. It will cost them at least three hundred pounds per day per person for lodging and full board. Add to that the transport and all other incidental expenses, and it goes up. Of course, the people who stay there can afford it.

People in the hotel business argue that, compared with hotels, the furnished apartments require less investment to build. They say their owners spend little on maintenance and that the apartments provide few job opportunities for local people. Visitors not only crowd into apartments, but they allegedly bring much of their own food and drink with them from their home communities. Moreover, they are not registered with the authorities and are thus informal visitors who are neither counted nor taxed, as is the case for hotel residents. As part of the informal sector, furnished apartments are not subject to tourism development plans and are free from rules and regulations promulgated by the ministry of tourism, as is also the case for the *sha'abi* hotels.

Local Evaluations

People in Marsa Matruh widely agree that tourism there has little or no adverse social or cultural impacts. The vast majority of visitors are compatriots from the Nile Valley or fellow Arabs from Libya and, occasionally, from Arabia. Guest and host both participate in the same general culture. Egyptian and other Arab visitors have no interest in seeing folkloric productions put on by the local "natives," and the northwest coast has so far been spared phoney "Bedouin nights" and other pseudo-folkloric extravaganzas recently invented for foreign tourists in Sinai.

The local people are sometimes annoyed by the crowds and the unruly behavior of some of their compatriots on holiday. The sale of alcohol and solicitations by a few prostitutes are discreetly managed, but the vast majority of the city's population does not approve of such activities, and a few people actively combat them. Some of Marsa Matruh's young men hang around on the beach outside a disco beyond a cordon set up to keep them away. Unable to join in, they enviously gawk at young women and men from the Nile Valley dancing together until late in the night. A ban in one of the main hotels on men wearing *galabiyas* is resented by some of the local Bedouin men and especially grates on our sensibilities. However, most local people accept the visitors and express no fear of a social or cultural threat from their presence. Indeed, holiday-makers in Marsa Matruh are mostly ignored by many of the city's Bedouin and Sons of the Nile Valley.

People in Marsa Matruh, however, do not agree on the economic impact of tourism in the city. The reader will remember that Bujra judged tourism as marginal to Marsa Matruh's economy in the 1960s, although many people thought the opposite. Almost thirty years later, the local manager of a hotel expressed a view similar to that of Bujra. He told us that people outside the

tourist business think that the profits realized by hotels during the summer months are enormous. However, "what we earn in summer can hardly be considered a profit if you think of all the months when we have almost no income." He says that Marsa Matruh is not experiencing an economic boom in tourism. An increase in the number of visitors has occurred, but that "can be a catastrophe, not a benefit." He reckons that before 1986 Marsa Matruh "had more prosperity with one quarter of the visitors we have now."

The view that Marsa Matruh, in general, does not benefit much from tourism was contradicted by another man, who has spent most of his life in the hotel business in the city. According to him, "Marsa Matruh lives on tourism. It grew on tourism. It does not live on anything else." His opinion is obviously an exaggeration that, as the reader will recognize, ignores the many other factors behind Marsa Matruh's growth. However, he reminded us that the recent construction of hotels and tourism oriented apartment buildings benefited local contractors and local workers, as well as contractors and workers from the Nile Valley. He noted that the reopening of the border between Egypt and Libya in the late 1980s led to the establishment of numerous small restaurants to serve people in transit to and from Libya and also stimulated sales in the local market. He qualified the complaint of some local people that the large numbers of low income visitors spend relatively little in the community by stressing that they do spend while on vacation. "People spend according to what they can afford. They rent a room in a hotel or a flat. They consume. Buy food, ice cream. Rent an umbrella."

A local man from the Sons of the Nile Valley who is marginally involved in tourism as part-time supervisor of an apartment building used by employees of a large company noted that the increased number of touristic establishments provides employment opportunities for local people but said they face stiff competition from people from the Nile Valley who are perceived to have more expertise in tourism related work. He also said,

The boy of the *carretta*, the man of the vegetables, the grocers make more money in the summer and benefit from the visitor who comes. The cultivator, too. He sells melons, mint, vegetables, almonds. Of course, local people benefit. There is substantial benefit. But traders from the Nile Valley also come here to sell their wares to the holiday-makers.

In my opinion, the people of Matruh do not rely on tourism as much as we did in the 1960s. *Ibn al-balad* ["son of the town"] today gets an education, goes to the university, and aims for a government job. The son of Matruh, whether from the Arabs or the Sons of the Nile Valley, is given preference in employment in government jobs here. Therefore, a lot of young people are employed [in regular, full-time jobs].

However, the manager of a large hotel mentioned that many locally-employed people supplement their income in summer by taking a second job in a hotel, driving a *carretta*, or performing some other tourism-related work. Reflecting on the changes that have occurred in Marsa Matruh's tourism since about 1980, he said,

Ours was a small operation in the past. But Marsa Matruh was small. Before, it was nicer, but now it is much better. Much, much better. But here, like everywhere else, big business can spoil the area. We have had a lot of expansion. The problem is that all this expansion took place without planning. Whoever wanted something managed to get it. This unplanned expansion made Marsa Matruh more of a *sha'abi* place. This does not mean that business would be bad in Marsa Matruh. Today, there is more quantity than quality. And a certain type of tourist left Marsa Matruh for Sharm ash-Shaikh [in Sinai] and other places. But the quantity increase has brought more business to hotels. The problem is to learn how to get that business.

The problem is not the quantities, but to restrict the *sha'abi* style. Of course, it is not a shame to be *sha'abi*. What I say is let's not always choose the cheapest alternatives. This will, of course, affect foreign tourism. There are other problems in the city—lack of cleanliness, the *carrettas*. The need for more restaurants, cinemas, other attractions for people to be able to enjoy themselves [and to spend].

Hundreds of thousands of visitors is quite a lot of people to descend on a small city of about forty thousand inhabitants during a period of about eight weeks. During July and August the place is packed. Revelers throng the corniche by the sea, Alexandria Street, and other main streets. Traffic jams of donkey-pulled *carrettas* (banned from the town's central district in 1996) occur. Shopkeepers do a brisk business, long lines form in front of bakeries, cafes are filled to overflowing, and traders hawk a wide variety of consumer items on the beaches and on the streets.

Determination of how much the local economy benefits from all this action awaits systematic measurement that will be difficult to achieve, given the myriad, informal dimensions of the holiday-making scene in Marsa Matruh. Surely the town benefits; but there are also costs. What is the value—to mention but one cost—of "free" Nile water pumped 300 kilometers across the desert to quench the thirst of holiday-makers and to provide them with showers after a day on the beach? Moreover, when the summer frenzy is over, Marsa Matruh returns to being quiet, calm, and uncrowded—a small provincial capital in an arid steppe.

CHAPTER 8

Desert Beachfront Development: The New Villages

The most dramatic change that has occurred in the governorate of Matruh since the early 1980s is the construction of tourist villages for summer holiday-making on the desert beaches of the Mediterranean Sea. About sixty such villages have mushroomed in the eastern part of the governorate, while another thirty have sprung up in areas adjacent to Marsa Matruh. This development is strongly tied to the interests of elites from Nile Valley Egypt to escape the lower-class “*sha’abi* style” during their summer vacations. As Egypt’s masses have increasingly taken over the older summer resorts, the elites have moved from place to place. A former high-ranking official in UNICEF and a professor emeritus from Cairo described how he and his family had moved over the decades, as follows:

In about 1935 when I was a kid, we had a house in Alexandria, in Anfushi. That was a crowded area at the end of a paved road near the beach. When Sidki Pasha built the corniche along the sea in 1940 or so, we and many other people started going to sites that developed on the beachfront east of Mahatat al-Raml [the city center]. We wanted to escape the crowded areas like Anfushi.

My brother and I started to rent places—first in Ibrahimiyah. Later on, we spent our summers at Camp Cesar, Cleopatra, Stanley Bey, Rushdy Pasha, and so on. About twenty new areas developed following the construction of the corniche by Sidki Pasha. The last summer we spent in Alexandria was at Ma’amura. I remember it because the *naksa* [“defeat” (during the Six Day War)] occurred while I was there. In 1967. That was the last resort we used before moving to the west, to al-’Ajami in 1968. We went there, I believe, for seven years. Then ‘Ajami got so crowded. And the sewage was all around you. And the mosquitos. So, we moved to Marsa Matruh.

My son was appointed at the [military] airport there. He introduced the area to me. I liked the place. A beautiful beach, natural formations. We spent a couple of summers in Marsa Matruh. Then, we moved to al-’Ajiba, about

25 kilometers west of [Marsa] Matruh. But, now we have mosquitos in 'Ajiba, the first time this year. So, I am thinking of going farther west, to Abu Lahu. I bought a piece of land there. And it is probably full of snakes, a wilderness. Nothing around you. No electricity yet. But there is a building; and my son thinks of remodeling it. It will take a long time, but my children will use it. I doubt that I will go there in my lifetime.

This pattern of movement, first within Alexandria and then to other places, has been common for most of the elite holiday-makers. They have not totally abandoned the older resorts, but many of them now go to the Red Sea and Sinai resorts. These are ideal winter resorts and, along with Fayid on the Suez Canal, are now frequented by upper-class and some middle-class families at the times of the Muslim feasts and at the mid-year school recess in winter. Despite their humidity and warm summer climate, these areas are also visited in summer by local holiday-makers—especially Sharm ash-Shaikh, which is now considered to be very "in" by younger people. The other very "in" area is what Egyptians now refer to as the *sahl ash-shimali*, "north coast," and by which they mean the new villages from west of Alexandria to beyond Marsa Matruh.

Beachfront Development

Obermeyer reports (personal communication: 1994) that while conducting anthropological fieldwork in Qasr in 1964–65 he occasionally trekked across the coastal sand dune for a solitary swim in the sea. He says he had a beach untouched by human development totally to himself. Were he to return to Qasr today, Obermeyer would undoubtedly be shocked and probably saddened by the transformation underway on the once pristine beach he enjoyed as a young man. In 1994, we often sat in the reception room of the home of a young man in Qasr, whose name—though he was just a baby at the time—was recorded by Obermeyer (1968:78) in his genealogy of Bait 'Umar. Sitting there, we encountered other young men from the Awlad 'Ali, including a contractor from Cairo, who were engaged in leveling the top of the sand dune with the use of bulldozers. Moreover, the young man whose home we visited had himself decided to become a subcontractor for aspects of the development of a part of the sand dune, which his paternal uncle had recently sold to a consortium of private developers from Saudi Arabia and the Nile Valley. We were told these developers planned to construct villas and apartment buildings in the sand of the leveled dune for sale to individuals for their private holiday use.

Legalistically speaking, our friend's uncle, an elderly senior of the Awlad 'Ali and Qasr's largest-scale farmer, had not actually sold the sand dune but had been paid "to lift his hand" (*yirfa'a al-yad*) from the land. Although part of his patrimony, the senior had no legal title to the land as private property but held it as *wad' yad*. His sheep and goats and those of his kindred had long grazed and browsed the rich natural vegetation that sprouted in the sand, which also caught and held significant runoff as underground water to be tapped by wells for drinking and irrigation. After paying the senior and following a land survey, the developers had then arranged officially to buy the property from the state, the legal owner of all of Egypt's desert lands. Thus the developers acquired formal title to the land as real estate, which they are free to sell to others. Probably, the developers—as we heard for similar cases—complained that they had to purchase the land twice, once from the Bedouin and then from the state. Nonetheless, the developers stand to reap a major windfall from resale of the land, whether or not they actually build on it.

The value of beachfront property in the northwest coast as real estate unencumbered by *wad' yad* has soared astronomically since the mid-1980s. What has happened to create a booming land market on a desert shore relatively remote from the Nile Valley and with almost no local supply of water? No easy answer to this question is available, and more research is needed. However, in this chapter we identify important features of this transformation. As was the case for early tourism development in Marsa Matruh, the mushrooming of these ninety or more tourist villages along the northwest coast is not a result of local initiatives from within the region. Their development stems from forces within the Nile Valley and also has strong links to the oil revenue-based economies of Arabia and Libya.

An example of a link to Libya is that country's financing of the construction of the international highway across the region. This highway has made access to the area almost painless, and a few local feeder roads financed by Egypt have greatly enhanced access to many but not yet all of the region's numerous beaches. Ties to Arabia include significant investments by wealthy Arabian individuals and by Arabian companies. Indirect links to the Arab oil economies are savings from income earned in those countries by middle-class and upper-class Nile Valley Egyptians from high salaries, lucrative business deals, generous consultants' fees, and the like.

Egypt's capital markets are small and are mainly limited to the banking sector, although several "Islamic" investment companies flourished for a short period during the 1980s and the country's recently reopened stock market exchange has attracted significant investments since the mid-1990s. Many Egyptians with ties to the oil economies have opted to invest dispos-

able cash in the purchase of housing for holiday use, with the added attraction that future sale of the housing promises a high net return from the investment. Of course, individual investors in beachfront holiday housing in the northwest coast are not limited to people with ties to the oil-exporting countries but include Nile Valley Egyptians who have prospered at home within the context of the Egyptian economy itself, especially as a result of changes introduced in the mid-1970s by President Anwar Sadat's *infatih*, or Open Door Economic Policy.

Total investment in beachfront development in the northwest coast, not including the cost of the highway, has exceeded LE 50 billion, according to a housing expert from the Nile Valley who is also a retired university professor, former member of the People's Assembly, and journalist. This man owns a chalet at Marina, the most luxurious village on the coast a few kilometers east of 'Alamain. He is the head of Marina's village board and estimates that the resort's development has cost "the government and people at least a billion [Egyptian] pounds," an amount that does not include private expenditures on the furnishing and interior decoration of Marina's palaces, villas, chalets, and apartments. He further alleges that "the very rich may be laundering their money through Marina."

Whatever its source and precise magnitude may be, the amount of private and state investment in the new beachfront development is relatively vast for a country such as Egypt, where the wide majority of citizens have low incomes and have to struggle to meet, at best, their basic subsistence needs. We do not doubt that Egypt's private and public funds could be put to more productive use in the development of Egypt's national economy, with benefit to a wider spectrum of citizens than is the case for investments in beachfront development in the northwest coast. We further note that what many Egyptians refer to as *filis al-hukuma*, "the government's money," is revenue derived from direct and indirect taxes citizens themselves pay and from other sources such as, say, fees for the use of the Suez Canal, which is not just the property of the state but a resource belonging to the nation at large. Thus, if the state invests directly in developing holiday resorts in the northwest coast and indirectly supports private investors through the sale of desert land at very cheap prices, then all Egyptians, including the masses, subsidize the elites who are the main direct beneficiaries of this beachfront development. As one man from the Nile Valley with a new villa on the coast said,

A major problem with all the new coastal villages is the usefulness of investing people's savings and the government's money in houses that are used for only two months a year or maybe not used at all. Also, why do we always

block the shore with structures that end up being walls to prevent ordinary people from enjoying the view?

This man and others with whom we spoke allege that cronyism plays a role in obtaining residences in the new villages by government ministers, other high-ranking state officials, and their friends. According to a professor emeritus in Cairo with long experience in the northwest coast, "Some sites are set aside in the villages for important people. Most of the ministers and high officials have obtained villas in most of the new places. But they seldom utilize them." He cited the cases of two ministers he knows personally. They first obtained villas very cheaply in Abu Sultana near Isma'iliya on the Suez Canal. They never used these villas but obtained other villas in Maraqia, one of the first main villages developed on the northwest coast. "Later on, they moved to Marabella, when it was developed, because Maraqia began to be too popular. More recently, they moved to Marina." He says the ministers were able to sell the villas they abandoned in the various villages for handsome profits.

State patronage is also said to be a factor in the new beachfront development. Journalists, university professors, and other professionals cheaply acquire beach residences, as the state allegedly buys their political support and muzzles criticism, especially by journalists. Speculation and allegations of cronyism, patronage, and money laundering taint the new holiday resorts, but most citizens who have purchased housing in the villages are "ordinary" people from the elites with significant financial assets. Their individual investments in such housing are legal and, in that sense, legitimate. Moreover, some of the villages have been developed as state projects by the military forces, the development and tourism ministries, and other state bodies. Others have been developed by formally organized civil associations or cooperatives. Still others are being set up by legally constituted private development companies. In all cases, building in the desert requires a series of permits from the military, the governorate, the ministries of development and tourism, and the supreme council for antiquities before construction can begin.

Although beachfront development in the northwest coast began informally in 'Ajami in the 1950s, all of the villages constructed after 1980 are formal projects. The magnitude and, in many cases, the luxury of building suggest excess; but the new villages are all formally legitimate. Moreover, and speculation aside, people who have acquired housing on the desert beaches have done so to escape the masses, or rather the "*sha'abi* style" and the "crowded places," so as to enjoy a summer holiday on Egypt's magnificent Mediterranean beaches in tranquility and with people of their own class.

The more luxurious villages are east of 'Alamain. They are located immediately north of the international highway which, in most cases, forms their southern borders. High walls define their southern and usually their eastern and western perimeters. They all have controlled access through massive gates, where uniformed guards stop all people seeking entrance. Each village has its own specific rules concerning entrance, but people without a residence in the village are usually denied access unless they are formally invited by a member of the village or pay a relatively high entrance fee. Public access to villages for the use of military officers and their families is, not surprisingly, highly restricted.

Inside the walls of some villages, the desert has bloomed. A lush greenery irrigated with Nile water defines well landscaped open spaces. Well paved streets provide internal communication networks of a quality unmatched in the rest of Egypt. Moreover, the villages are strictly zoned, with large villas or palaces facing the sea and smaller chalets and/or apartment buildings behind them. Some of the villages have a mosque and a commercial area with shops, a few restaurants, and a bar or nightclub. However, commercial services and public entertainment facilities within the villages are relatively little developed.

Egyptian holiday-making is mainly a family affair; and most holiday entertainment among the elites takes place within the context of elaborate private parties. Although some go to the beach early in the morning, most of the elites on holiday get up late and then spend much of the afternoon on the beach or around private swimming pools. They tend to group together on the beach as age-graded and sometimes gender-specific cliques. Informal but well catered parties, in some cases with alcoholic drinks, are a common part of the beach ritual. People host late afternoon lunches at their residences or go elsewhere as the guests of others. Lunch is followed by a nap and then a late tea at home. People then get ready for the evening's entertainment. For some, the evening begins with cocktails with guests at home or at someone else's place. Toward midnight, many will go to a private party for drinks and copious buffet suppers with a wide selection of expensive delicacies. They may then end the evening toward dawn at a public nightclub.

These rituals vary, of course. Not everybody consumes alcohol, and many spend much of their time quietly visiting with family and friends. Private parties do not take place every night. However and whatever the style, holiday entertainment among the elites is private, with minor dependence on public places and events—a phenomenon which is also the case among the masses. Private entertainment among the elites usually involves heavy expenditures for food and beverages, requires the work of servants, and provides employment and income for caterers and sometimes perform-

ers such as belly dancers and musicians. The food, beverage, and personnel inputs for this entertainment style are mainly brought from Cairo or Alexandria. The villages thus provide few local employment opportunities for workers and have only small-scale need for the local establishment of commercial enterprises.

The walls of the holiday resorts protect the elites from intrusion by "ordinary" people from the masses who might "spoil" the scene with crowding and the "*sha'abi* style." The villages strive to guard their beaches from what has happened to the beach at Marsa Matruh, where a Son of the Nile Valley said, "Our beach is dirty. Broken glass, rusted cans. Crowded with people cooking and eating and smoking the *shisha*, [waterpipe]." He says "good families" have been driven away from Marsa Matruh to other places where "ladies can wear swimming suits." The potential impact of the masses on the elite holiday resorts is not an unfounded paranoia among the elites but a fear based on previous experience in older resorts.

Moreover, an increasing prevalence of conservative norms articulated in religious terms within the wider society threatens aspects of public holiday behavior among the elites, while unwanted lewd behavior by *sha'abi* youths and men against women on the beaches and especially in the sea is also a problem, most prominently in the crowded, older resorts. Of course, the elites are not divorced from the norms of the wider society. As is the case on Egyptian beaches dominated by the "*sha'abi* style," one sees veiled women fully clothed in long dresses enter the sea at the country's elite resorts and notices men with long legged, loose fitting swimming suits designed to conform with Holy Qur'anic injunctions about modest dress codes for both genders. Still, "immodest" swimming suits continue to be worn by both genders in the elite resorts, although such apparel has all but vanished for women on *sha'abi* beaches.

The walls of the new northwest coast tourist villages also block most of the local people from access to areas that, with their development, have been lost to the Bedouin as part of their patrimonial heritage. Issues of land tenure and of land "sales" and "expropriations" are discussed in the next chapter. However, we note here that Bedouin were forcibly removed by the military from at least one area, at Sidi Krair, to make way for what we were told is "one of the largest and best-planned villages reserved for the army and high officials," although the military originally announced the construction of a strategic air base on the site. Moreover, according to the head of Marina's board, "Land is the source of wealth, and some [Nile Valley people] wanted to grab the land from the Arabs and get rich by selling it again."

The Case of One Village

Before closing this presentation we take a brief look at the 'Ajiba tourist village, the westernmost beachfront development in the Matruh governorate. This village occupies an area that is two kilometers long and two hundred meters wide on a beautiful white sand beach about 35 kilometers west of Marsa Matruh near the Sanusiya *zawiya* and village of 'Umm al-Rakham. 'Ajiba has 328 small chalets, each about ninety square meters in size and consisting of two bedrooms, a living and dining area, kitchen, bath, and front porch. In addition, the village has sixteen slightly larger chalets built for government ministers and a medium-sized hotel with a swimming pool and a small attached complex of apartments. 'Ajiba is a project of the Matruh governorate and thus differs from other new villages set up as projects by the military, the development ministry, the tourism ministry, civil associations, or private developers. 'Ajiba is not as luxurious as some of the other main villages and, at the same time, is not as crowded with housing as is the case for a few recent projects oriented toward lower middle income holiday-makers.

The 'Ajiba project was initiated by the governorate at the beginning of the 1980s. According to one of the village's first participants, the governor at that time "wanted to confine the village to a homogeneous group of people from the middle or higher middle classes that would not include the *nouveaux riches*." Accordingly, the project was not formally announced, as has usually been the case for other villages, but the governor personally contacted people he knew, and these people then spread the news informally among their acquaintances.

The price of a ninety square meter chalet was set at LE 15,000 in 1981. Those who wanted chalets made down payments; and two hundred chalets began to be built as part of the project's first phase. The contractor was a man from Alexandria whose company had previously constructed many public buildings in Marsa Matruh. The contractor's fee is said to have been LE 7,000 per chalet. Five years later, when the work for this phase was completed, the governorate increased the sale price of chalets to LE 25,000—an amount the governorate claims does not cover all indirect costs for related infrastructure, such as extension of the electrical grid to the village and paving of the main access road. Despite the increase in price, all of the two hundred chalets were sold. Then, according to one of the chalet owners,

I was sitting here, and the governor and the prime minister came by and said they were looking at the place. The prime minister said, "I need one or two

chalets." He liked the place. So, they built six more chalets where they were not supposed to be built. The law at that time forbade building within 500 meters from the sea. Now, the limit is 200 meters. They built his chalets directly on the sea, not even one meter away. Those six chalets became sixteen. Every minister wanted one, but they never used them. Their chalets were larger and I think they paid thirty-two thousand pounds for each. They sold them for a hundred to a hundred and fifty thousand pounds each.

Eventually, an additional 128 chalets were built and sold by the governorate. Those who purchased chalets expected eventually to be able to buy the land on which their chalets are located. After a long delay, the city council in Marsa Matruh agreed to the land sales and set the price at LE 32 per square meter for land fronting on the sea—with one fourth of the amount to be paid as a down payment and the remainder by installment. However, the supreme council for antiquities objected and initiated a case in court against the governorate, accusing the governorate of having illegally built the village on an archaeological site. A settlement has been recently agreed, as we were told, and chalet owners now hope to obtain private ownership of the land.

About twenty-five of the original chalet owners (other than the ministers) are said to have sold their chalets for handsome profits. As many as 107 chalets have never been used by their owners, some of whom are said to have never even visited 'Ajiba. Only fifty-six of the chalets were occupied at the apex of the summer season during August 1994. Low occupancy rates are common to most of the new villages, as in Marina where one well-informed observer estimates that "the maximum occupancy is about 20 percent, and the average stay of those who go does not exceed twenty days." One problem 'Ajiba encounters is its distance from Cairo, which is too long a commute, especially for family members who may have to travel to Cairo for business reasons while the rest of the family remains on holiday. The village's remote isolation is enhanced by a lack of telephones, although a few were installed in 1993. Some, especially younger people, complain that 'Ajiba has no social life other than family gatherings in the small chalets. Moreover, the chalets tend to be very hot in the summer, as they were designed without windows to the northwest, the direction from which most summer breezes come. The water supply is problematic and electricity is erratic. Garbage disposal has also become a special problem. According to one chalet owner,

The garbage is now a big problem. How can we dispose of it? We used to have a dumping area, about ten kilometers away. But a company purchased the site and is planning a huge project there, including a large hotel. So, they

prevent us from dumping the garbage. We found a small site about three kilometers away and burn the garbage there. But you cannot burn everything. The organic material decays, and now we have mosquitos and flies. When we burn the garbage, the smoke comes back over the village and pollutes it. What to do? The governorate does nothing to help us with this problem. I complained to the governor, and he sent two or three people to spray with DDT. But DDT is forbidden everywhere else in the world. If all the chalet owners were to come, we would have an even bigger problem.

The owners of chalets in 'Ajiba have formed an association, which is also common in other villages. They have a board of directors with a head, all of whom are volunteers. Members of the association pay an annual subscription of about LE 250, and the money collected is used to clean up the beach, remove sand from the roads, replace street lamps, maintain a small desalination plant, and pay Bedouin guards from the area and security guards brought from Cairo. In addition, gratuities are paid to governorate and local council employees who perform "work" for the village. However, the association takes primary responsibility for operating and maintaining the village.

'Ajiba's distant location from Cairo undoubtedly has contributed to its low occupancy rates. However, its remote isolation has also been an attraction for some wishing to spend a quiet relaxed holiday on the beach. Although few amenities are available in the village itself, several Bedouin shopkeepers in 'Umm al-Rakham village provide summer visitors with vegetables, fruit, and other necessities procured in Marsa Matruh, while other Bedouin from the area provide other services, such as delivering water by tanker, contracting to make minor repairs and additions to the chalets, and so on. These local people thus have some benefit from the project while they provide visitors with needed services. However, 'Ajiba's quiet isolation and its once almost pristine character is being transformed.

The hotel constructed on a ten-feddan tract of land within the village opened in 1994. Owned by a Cairene with restaurants in Cairo and a background of emigration to Canada, the hotel charges low rates of about LE 70 per day with full board and is seen by some as introducing quantity without quality to 'Ajiba. Moreover, the hotel owner, we were told, "does not know what to do with the water from hotel's swimming pool. So, he dumps it in the desert behind the hotel and has created a putrid swamp where mosquitos breed." Meanwhile sites around the village are being rapidly developed. These include three new villages densely packed with apartment buildings still mostly under construction, an area for six hundred villas developed by

two Bedouin investors, and a project for seventy villas to be used for convalescence as part of a medical tourism endeavor initiated by a consortium of Saudi Arabians and Egyptians working in Saudi Arabia.

Concluding Remarks

One chalet owner at 'Ajiba told us that he used to especially enjoy sitting on the porch of his chalet to watch wave after wave of migrating birds arrive across the Mediterranean from Europe during September. He says they flew directly overhead. Now, they seem to notice all the building that has taken place and veer to the west to enter North Africa over the ancient open range with its scattered Bedouin settlements and homesteads. However, beach-front development schemes are now in the planning stages for areas farther west, especially at Ras Abu Lahu.

His comment about the birds reminds us of the fourth century report by Ammianus Marcellinus about hippopotami that were once plentiful in the Nile Valley, especially in the delta. He wrote that,

Now they are nowhere to be found, since, as the inhabitants of those regions conjecture, they became tired of the multitude [of people] . . . and were forced to take refuge in the land of the Blemmyes" (quoted in Bowman 1986:14–15).

We reiterate that tourism development in Marsa Matruh and in the new villages on the desert beaches is a transformation that radiates from changes within Nile Valley Egypt and is linked to the country's formal, semiformal, and informal tourism sectors. The new tourism also forms part of the desert development matrix delineated in Chapter 1, as it contributes to the construction boom in the desert, provides investment and job opportunities, represents an expansion into the desert of activities formerly restricted to locations in the Nile Valley, and depends on the use of Nile water.

Meanwhile our analysis shows that the region's new tourism is dominated by local Egyptian holiday-making and also attracts moderate numbers of Arab tourists, especially Libyans and some visitors from the Arabian Peninsula. Only minimal numbers of foreign tourists go to the area. As a result, the local people of Matruh are not confronted with significant cultural impacts; but we join many of Matruh's Bedouin and Sons of the Nile Valley in questioning the relative benefits to the region of investing huge amounts of capital to construct what a Son of the Nile Valley called "those silent, concrete structures." A vast stock of new buildings for holiday-

makers remains empty throughout most of the year and also occupies most of an ecological niche of the narrow steppe that formerly flourished with figs or provided excellent pasturage for livestock.

CHAPTER 9

Land, Law, Leaders, and Identities

Several issues the local people of Matruh repeatedly raised strike us as laden with contradiction and ambiguity. Land tenure and new problems related to changes in land ownership were mentioned often, especially by Bedouin. Almost everyone spoke of Awlad 'Ali '*urf* as a system of dispute settlement that is more effective than the Egyptian state system formally applied in the region; and some called attention to how '*urf* is being adapted to deal with new issues and changed dimensions of old ones. Questions of leadership and the selection of people to serve on representative boards often came up in discussions and suggest the emergence of class divisions and a countervalent but unintended strengthening of kin-based groups by the application of state and other formal development programs. Finally, changing dimensions of identity emerged, as we spoke with Bedouin in town and on the range and with settlers from among the Sons of the Nile Valley in town about their perceptions of the change and development their region has undergone.

We have touched on land, customary law, leadership, and changing identities in previous chapters. However, in this chapter we take a more focused look at these issues, because we conclude that each constitutes a key element in the transformation that gathers momentum in the northwest coast. As in other chapters, the presentation here interweaves the voices of the people of Matruh with our interpretations; but in this last chapter before our formal conclusion we speak out perhaps more forcefully than elsewhere in this narrative.

The Land Issue

"The ownership of land is a thorny problem in the whole governorate of Matruh," we were told by a well-educated farmer from the Awlad 'Ali. "No Bedouin has a legal document regarding the land. We have nothing to prove our ownership." Claims to land ownership, strongly asserted by the Awlad 'Ali, Jumi'at, and other Bedouin, are patrimonial claims legitimized by '*urf*, wherein rights to immobile property such as land, wells, and cisterns are

inherited by males on the basis of patrilineal descent. Such property can be held jointly as *jumla* by the ancestor's male descendants or divided individually among them. Although individual rights of inheritance are recognized, kin groups maintain residual collective interests in the property. As an Awlad 'Ali senior explained,

This desert that you see is all divided between tribes and clans and between the different lineages. These land divisions are recorded on paper; and these papers are kept with the tribe or the clan. They are kept by an individual—maybe the '*aqila*, or the shaikh, an old man. We have made borders. And we have marked these borders with piles of stone. Still, disagreements exist about the borders. We have conflicts over the land. But the conflicts are settled by the clans.

Internal conflicts among the Bedouin over patrimonial land rights result, in part, from demographic changes, as indicated by a middle-aged man from the Awlad 'Ali in the case of his lineage in the area of Qasr:

From, say, 1900 to the present, we move from one man, 'Umar, to about two hundred men. About five kilometers existed between him and the next people. He had nine sons. And the land divisions were fairly large. These nine men had fifty-six sons. The land had to be divided between these men in smaller tracts. And the divisions had to be more clearly marked. Today, we see the houses very close together. We have to specify and clarify the divisions. And people argue about them.

Land has social meaning among Bedouin in the northwest coast. However, a major change in the region is the commoditization of land. Many Bedouin view the alienation of land to outsiders as selling off a part of their identity. A few speak of land sales as social genocide. Nonetheless, individual Bedouin sell their patrimony for small and large amounts of money, and many readily work as go-betweens to arrange land sales. In the words of an "elected" representative on the Marsa Matruh district council,

Awlad 'Ali say that no strangers should enter the tribe. But land is now sold to strangers from outside the tribe. I am free to sell the land, but I must first tell my relatives that I want to sell it. If they cannot afford it, I can sell it to the stranger. But my family may try to buy it back from this stranger.

What we sell now is the land on the seashore. This land is being taken away from us. It is sold. But people say to themselves that it is better to take some compensation for this land, because they fear they will lose everything

otherwise. Sometimes the land is expropriated. We still have the agricultural land and the grazing land. We have not yet lost those lands [or sold them].

The Egyptian state formally recognizes three types of legal land ownership: private ownership, cooperative ownership, and state ownership. Tribal or communal ownership of land is not recognized by Egyptian law. Desert land classified as *aradi bur*, “undeveloped lands,” that has not been surveyed is *malkiya khasa lil-dawla*, “state property;” “private property of the state,” which the state can use, lease, or sell. Law 143 for the year 1981 defines state property in desert governorates as all land outside the borders (*zimam*) of existing and future cities and villages. This law stipulates that the ministry of defense has the right to use this land for strategic purposes, but, with the permission of the ministry of defense, such land can be developed by the ministry of land reclamation or used and disposed of by the ministry of development and new communities. In addition, the cabinet has the authority to dispose of land and buildings in the desert upon the recommendation of the ministry of defense (Arab Republic of Egypt:1989).

People in the northwest coast speak of “expropriations” of land by the state, particularly the military. One notable case they classify as “expropriation” is the area at Sidi Krair mentioned in Chapter 8. Bedouin say they were approached by representatives from the military who informed them they would have to move away from this land to make way for a new strategic airport to be built on the site. Bedouin say the officers told them that the desert is wide and that they could relocate themselves somewhere else. Bedouin say they countered that this was their ancestral land, that this was prime land for fig production, that other areas could not compensate for the loss of their fig orchards, and that, moreover, the desert was not empty but already occupied by other Bedouin with their own patrimonial claims to the land. Bedouin say the area was then surrounded by tanks, and they were ordered to leave. A standoff ensued while the Bedouin sent a delegation to Cairo to present their case to sympathetic representatives in the People’s Assembly and to lobby high state officials on their behalf. Bedouin say they found support for their cause, but the order was not rescinded. They had to abandon the land. The strategic airport was never built, but the area was developed as a summer resort.

Another notable case of “expropriation” is what Bedouin say is a large-scale land reclamation project initiated by the army near Sidi Barrani. They say the project covers “thousands of feddans” and has “destroyed many families who had to go to Libya” in search of a new livelihood. We were told that the area being reclaimed had been excellent grazing land and formerly sustained large numbers of livestock. Bedouin say the land should have been

left for livestock production and complain that attempts by the army to cultivate wheat on the land is especially inappropriate. Barley would have been better, they say, because barley requires less water than wheat. Bedouin say they sent a delegation to Cairo and lobbied against the project, but to no avail. According to a man from the Jumi'at, who is one of the better educated men in the region and a leading entrepreneur, the result is *tashir*, "desertification." "Deep plowing destroyed the natural range and loosened the topsoil, which is now blowing away," he said.

What Bedouin see as "expropriations" are not such from the perspective of Egyptian law. The military and other state institutions do not expropriate land in the desert but legally make use of property that belongs to the state. Bedouin are fully aware that their claims to the land are moral claims, not legal rights. As one man put it, "We have our papers. But we do not have *tamluk* ["ownership"]. All we have is *wad' yad*." As previously indicated, *wad' yad* literally means "placing the hand." Someone places a hand on the land and has what some call squatter's rights. However, the "right" is not formally recognized by law, and the "squatters" have held the land for at least two hundred years and long before the promulgation of contemporary land ownership laws by the state. Nonetheless, the state informally recognizes *wad' yad*; and a procedure was developed during the presidency of Anwar Sadat to allow compensation to people holding land under *wad' yad* in cases of state-approved land sales to individuals or cooperatives.

Most beachfront areas in the northwest coast have been incorporated within the boundaries of cities and villages, where land in desert governorates can be legally owned. If an individual or a cooperative wishes to purchase such land, a petition is submitted to the appropriate local government authority. A committee is formed, investigates the land, and sets the price. If a person or party can prove *wad' yad* to have existed on the land for at least fifteen years, the buyer pays that person or party "to lift the hand." The buyer also pays an amount to the state and thus owns the land as private property or as cooperative property, depending on the case.

Most purchases of land on the seashore have been made by people from outside the northwest coast, which is to say Nile Valley Egyptians. They, as citizens of Egypt, correctly believe that they have legitimate rights to buy land in the northwest coast and anywhere else within Egypt's sovereign territories. Although a few Nile Valley Egyptians advocate respect for the patrimonial claims of the Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin to desert land, others are not moved by such claims. To the contrary, many Nile Valley Egyptians with an opinion on the subject believe that the Bedouin illegitimately extort payments for state-owned desert land and conclude that the Bedouin have benefited enormously, but wrongly, from recent land sales.

Some Bedouin have acquired private ownership of beachfront properties through payments to other Bedouin "to lift the hand" and through formal purchase of the land from the state. In one case, two Bedouin men acquired about seventy feddans of prime beachfront land along a three-kilometer stretch of the sea near the old Sanusiya *zawiya* at 'Umm al-Rakham. They subdivided the property into about six hundred plots and then resold the land to individuals to build private villas or chalets on the sites. Although Bedouin, these men are also investors and private land developers; and, like businessmen generally, they have been guided by profit motives. However, those who made the original sale of their *wad' yad* on the land were mostly poor Bedouin cultivators and herders. The cash they received was but a fraction of the profits realized by the Bedouin investors. Thus, as businessmen, a few Bedouin benefit considerably from the new beachfront development. Still, the main beneficiaries of this transformation are people from outside the region.

Ambiguously, the state and international agencies have provided Bedouin in the northwest coast with financial and other support to construct houses, cisterns, dams, and dikes. They have provided seedlings at subsidized prices and encouraged people to cultivate olives, figs, and other perennial crops. They have provided subsidized fodder and thus encouraged people not only to maintain but to expand animal husbandry. In 1964, the state promised, by law number 100, land ownership to those who developed farms with fruit trees. Another law, number 632, states that a person who reclaimed, cultivated, planted, or built on land before September 1980 has the right to own it (Arab Republic of Egypt 1990; 1991). However, according to an Awlad 'Ali farmer,

To say is one thing and to do is another. We declared the land we have and what we have planted on it in 1967, as we were asked to do. My house was built in 1969. However, the government can theoretically take the land back or any part of it. I have no title and I cannot use the land as collateral to obtain a loan from the bank to develop it further.

The Shari'a, the *qanun*, and ministerial decrees are on our side or support our case to own the land. A special institution has been set up to supervise the ownership of land. It has employees and a building. But, from 1964 to 1994, thirty years, the laws have not been enforced. We find no reason why the laws are not enforced. Is it because they want to frighten us? To keep us insecure? I have a small farm, I have no legal document to prove ownership. I may wake up tomorrow and find a school is being constructed there. I have invested time and money in my farm.

One can blame the state for a legal system of land ownership that is inappropriate for desert lands productively used for grazing and cultivation. Certainly, the present limbo within which cultivators and livestock-raisers in the northwest coast find themselves with regards the land is a violation of their ancestral rights. However, the land tenure issue is complex and is laden not only with social and economic dimensions but with ecological factors as well.

Given seasonal variations and the vagaries of the rainfall pattern, flexible access to different habitats for multiple land uses is highly desirable in the northwest coast. Despite the existence of inequities, the old kin-ordered nomadic system effectively managed controlled flexibility in land uses in the ancient range. Sedentarization, population growth, and the commoditization of land have combined with other factors to make the old system obsolete, except for social and local political considerations. However, individual ownership of productive land in the steppe based on, say, the model of fixed units of land in the Nile Valley is not appropriate for the northwest coast, except for land with tree crops. What about access to land for barley cultivation, given the yearly variations in rainfall and the consequent need to shift planting from one location to another? How can controlled but flexible use of the range lands by the region's multitude of small scale livestock-raisers be managed if the land is fully privatized and perhaps eventually fenced off into closed units?

The design of a land tenure system that would guarantee local equity, provide recognition for the efforts of those who have already invested money and work in the development of farms, introduce an appropriate ecological zoning strategy, and not infringe on the rights of Egyptian citizens from outside the region staggers the imagination. The design, implementation, and maintenance of such a system requires political will, expert knowledge of existing land use and of natural habitats, and sophisticated knowledge and understanding of local social and political organization. The successful adoption of an equitable and ecologically appropriate land tenure system requires the active participation of local people in interaction with legislators, state officials, and experts in various social and ecological fields.

However, the current *de facto* system of land tenure in the steppe drifts rapidly toward private ownership. All that remains as a block to full privatization of landholdings is a state decree recognizing the existing system of informal land ownership, or *wad' yad*, in the crop production and grazing zones of the region. The Bedouin could thus acquire legal ownership of their ancestral land. They could then be free to sell the land and, thereby, lose their moral claim to an ancient patrimony. Therein lies a dilemma, the consequences of which are not pondered by the Bedouin or others in Matruh.

'Urf in New Situations

The dilemma land ownership presents does not extend to the adaptation of '*urf*' to changed circumstances in the northwest coast. Awlad 'Ali '*urf*' is universally praised by the people of Matruh as a highly effective system of conflict resolution and dispute settlement. Adherence to the '*urf*' forms a major component of identity among the Bedouin, whether living in the city or on the range, and embraces the Awlad 'Ali, the Jumi'at, and other people with tribal identities. We were struck by the pride they express for their '*urf*' and the many unsolicited comments we heard about how the '*urf*' is a system capable of solving all conflicts. When asked if conflicts exist, the usual Bedouin reply is a hearty "No. We resolve them."

Sons of the Nile Valley who are settlers in Marsa Matruh also speak highly of the '*urf*'. A young, university-educated Son of the Nile Valley, employed in the governorate and the owner of a small business, commented that "as the city becomes more complex, problems will end up more often in the police station." However, he said that if he had a problem with someone, he would not argue with the man but take the case to an '*aqila*'. He reckoned that chances were about 95 percent that the '*aqila*' would settle the problem and also expressed a point of view we often heard: "This social way of settling problems is better, more effective, and faster than going to the police and getting involved in court cases with lawyers and all that."

The state does not formally recognize the '*urf*', and all citizens and others in the northwest coast are subject to Egyptian state law. However, the state sometimes looks the other way and informally allows the local people to resolve conflicts among themselves without significant interference by the authorities. Nonetheless, state law is applied to criminals, and wrongdoers are often punished by both systems. Moreover, respect for the '*urf*' that state officials may have had in the past is probably less today, as suggested in the following statement by a university-educated accountant from the Awlad 'Ali who is in his early thirties:

The government employees and the police do not know very much about the '*urf*', or how we settle problems. They may not know who the '*aqila*' is or what he does. To know about our system they would have to be here for two, three, five years. Some of them know, those who have been here a long time. But, nowadays, the police and most of the officials are transferred from place to place around the whole country and they follow the directives of their ministries in Cairo.

The Awlad 'Ali say that elders met together some centuries ago, agreed on a set of rules and procedures for resolving disputes and dealing with acts of wrongdoing, and had the agreements written down. To say that these agreements constitute a formal legal code would be an overstatement, but people express wide agreement on the basic features of the '*urf*', which developed in a tribal setting to deal with issues that were important in the past. However, the '*urf*' is more than just an artifact of the past or a part of folklore. People in the northwest coast are adapting the '*urf*' to deal with contemporary issues. Moreover, they say the '*urf*' is consonant with the Shari'a in many instances but also recognize that '*urf*' and Shari'a differ significantly on important issues. They strongly contrast the '*urf*' with the state's legal system but do not deny the legitimacy of state laws and procedures. Concerning the state's system, they mainly complain that it is not effectively applied in the northwest coast and say that its procedures are cumbersome and do not quickly and efficiently settle disputes.

The '*urf*' involves kindreds and has the position of wise man ('*aqila*). It has a procedure for providing refuge and protection (*nizala*) and employs special sessions (*mi'ad*) for discussing cases and announcing agreements or settlements. The system also makes use of oaths and of experts for specialized issues. These various aspects of the '*urf*' are threatened by changes that have occurred in the region. Solidarity among men within a lineage—a fundamental feature of the '*urf*'—is challenged by new commercial relations, land sales, and perhaps the emergence of a body of educated young men who may eventually challenge their elders and move to disassociate themselves from their uneducated cohorts. Still, ties to kindreds remain strong for most Bedouin in the region.

The position of '*aqila*' is highly respected by the Awlad 'Ali and other Bedouin. Sons of the Nile Valley long settled in Marsa Matruh know individuals who hold this position, speak highly of them, and say that they, too, seek their council and mediation in cases of conflict. However, performance of the role requires increasingly heavy expenditures of time and wealth. Since the introduction of modern transportation, more men stop by the house of an '*aqila*' more often to discuss minor and major problems. Since they are guests, he provides them with tea and usually a meal, which requires the slaughter of one or more animals. Each visit extends over several hours, and he often has to travel to Marsa Matruh and other places to negotiate a settlement. If a man has business interests or is managing a new farm or ranching activity, will he be able to devote a major portion of his time to settling disputes? Animals are costly, and will he be willing to bear the costs of multiple slaughters? This issue was specifically raised by the nephew of an elderly '*aqila*', who said,

People are concerned about the '*urf*. I do not believe that it will end completely. But with life's pressures, people no longer have the time. The '*urf* requires full-time attention, and no one can afford that now, unless the tribes create a special position and pay someone a salary. Most of the '*awaqil* are now elderly men, and I am not sure that men from the younger generation will choose to shoulder the responsibilities of the position. However, some people have a strange love for settling problems between people.

Changes in the region also affect the *nizala*, whereby a whole kindred subject to violent retribution because of the action of a member or members of the group moves to the territory of another kindred for a year of refuge while passions cool and attempts to reach a settlement are negotiated. Now that all the Bedouin are sedentary and many have farms that require work and irrigation or business interests to take care of, relocation in another territory is much more difficult than in the old days of tents and nomadism. Nonetheless, many Bedouin say they are willing to suffer such privation, if required. Moreover, the Jumi'at and some *murabtin* take pride in claiming that they now provide *nizala*, a privilege formerly vested exclusively in Awlad 'Ali lineages of Sa'ada descent status.

The oath, another main feature of the '*urf*, continues without significant change so long as kindreds maintain their solidarity. In a dispute where different claims are made about some issue, the problem can be solved by the swearing of an oath in a religious setting, such as a mosque. A man from one kindred claims, for example, that a well was dug by his ancestor and thus belongs to him, while another man from a different kindred claims that the well belongs to him. A specified number of selected men from one of the kindreds can be called to swear an oath on the subject. If all of these men appear and swear the oath without making any mistake, then that kindred's claim is verified. Otherwise, the other kindred's claim is considered to be substantiated.

The final main feature of the '*urf* is the use of specialists to deal with issues of a "technical" nature. When disputes involve problems related to, say, agriculture or herding, the '*awaqil* may arrange for people with recognized expertise on the subject to participate in the dispute settlement. If the disputants agree, such a person is called in and makes a "ruling" on the case. The expertise of such specialists is mainly limited to the old herding and agriculture. However, the new economy has a changed agriculture and a different type of livestock production system and involves the formation of companies, the use of contractors, and so on. According to a young Bedouin lawyer from the Awlad 'Ali, cases involving new commercial relations should be, and are, dealt with according to the state's civil code. However,

his cousin, a young Bedouin accountant, argues that new issues should be addressed within the framework of the '*urf*', if a body of relevant new expertise is developed. He said,

If we speculate about the rise of the '*urf*', people were probably concerned about the problem of taking revenge for murder. So, they created the '*urf*' to regulate disputes and crimes between groups instead of leaving it up to individuals.

The Arabs face new conditions today. Some modification in the '*urf*' is necessary for it to continue to play an effective role. For example, how do we ascertain guilt in the case of car accidents? The formation of companies and the writing of contracts raise new issues. These matters have to be discussed and agreed upon.

This young man, the deputy director of a bank, described several cases in which the principles of the '*urf*' had been applied in novel situations. In one case, five men from the Awlad 'Ali contributed capital to buy sheep for export to Saudi Arabia. Nothing was written down. One of the men took charge of the activity, and after some time the others asked him how the business was going. He said they had lost almost everything. His partners challenged him to swear an oath to that effect with men from his lineage. His kinsmen did not know about the situation and refused to swear the oath. However, his kinsmen agreed to pay half the outstanding amount of money if he agreed to pay the remainder. As the young man commented, "One can be hurt by the actions of others in your tribe. But that is destiny."

Another case concerned the head of a local cooperative society. According to the young man,

A local cooperative received fodder from the central cooperative for sale to the Bedouin. The procedure is that the head of the local cooperative deposits money from the sales with the central cooperative. The comptroller in the central cooperative is a migrant, and the head of the local cooperative is an Arab. Upon checking the accounts one day, a deficit of thirty-seven thousand pounds showed up in the accounts of the local cooperative.

The head of the local cooperative was called in and asked about the outstanding sum. He replied that he did not know about any deficit and that he had turned over all the money he had received from the sales to the comptroller. Of course, he had not taken any receipts for the money he turned in. He was acting in the traditional way and said he had not even counted the money.

What was he to do? Maybe the comptroller had embezzled it.

The head of the local cooperative asked for time to get the money and went back to his tribe and asked them to help him. I am not sure what happened; but thirty-seven thousand pounds were turned into the central cooperative. Maybe they sold some land. Others in his tribe helped him raise the cash. This was a lesson to him and to others that today you have to formalize relations and obtain written statements when dealing with money.

These two cases both show the need for written records and agreements in the new economy in the northwest coast. They also demonstrate the continued solidarity of kindreds. So long as men agree to share responsibility for the actions of their kinsmen, the '*urf*' is likely to continue and will evolve in new directions. Limits exist, however, as to what the '*urf*' can, or will, address. An example of one limit is a case in which some men are said to have gone to their '*aqila*' and complained that others had stolen narcotics they had smuggled into the country. He told them that their dealing with narcotics was *haram*, "forbidden," and that this was not a case for the '*urf*'. He sent them away but, out of loyalty to them as kinsmen, he did not inform the police.

The '*urf*' and its use today thus reflect the changing economy and polity in the region. Developed as a means of maintaining social order and resolving disputes during the long absence of effective state administration, the '*urf*' was not replaced by the Sanusiya, who actively engaged in dispute settlement during the decades of their preeminence in the region. The '*urf*' survived British colonial administrators who had people arrested and then judged and jailed them. Meanwhile the Egyptian state, especially active in the area since about 1960, formally ignores the '*urf*' but allocates space in the Marsa Matruh city and district council building where '*awaqil*' and disputants can meet together to work out solutions to problems that, in theory, can be solved by the state's own civil code.

We are prejudiced, perhaps because we are anthropologists, in favor of the '*urf*' and the continuation of the social solidarity that it embodies. However, we also recognize that changed circumstances in the northwest coast demand the existence of a clear and unambiguous legal system that guarantees the rights of all in a growing and increasingly complex society and economy. Full application of the Shari'a has some but not many supporters in the northwest coast, although almost everybody formally expresses deep respect for the Shari'a. Certainly, the legal system is at least as important to the region's development as are new crops and a better marketing and distribution system. Already, an Awlad 'Ali lawyer has initiated a comparative study of the '*urf*' and the state's legal system. Hopefully, his research will not cast the '*urf*' as an artifact of the past but will provide a first step toward

the creation of a system that draws on the strengths of the past to address problems of the present.

Leadership and Representation

A discussion of leaders and representatives cannot be divorced from a consideration of the groups led and the people represented. Moreover, leadership and representation in the northwest coast inevitably involve interactions between the state and tribes or clans. We have indicated that state appointed '*umdas*' and shaikhs have existed in the region since the nineteenth century. These old positions have mostly become hereditary, and '*umdas*' and shaikhs now receive, at best, token payments from the state. Some men in these positions are now all but ignored, but some enjoy easy access to state authorities and benefit from this access. The question is who benefits most, the individual and his family or the wider community? Some told us that '*umdas*' and shaikhs are respected and use their influence for the common good. Many others spoke of these people with ridicule and disdain. By contrast, the '*aqila*', which is not a state appointment, is much more widely respected among the Bedouin and the Sons of the Nile Valley long resident in the region.

New leadership positions began to be created around 1960 within the system of cooperative societies and within local government. Popular and executive councils at the levels of villages, cities, districts, and the governorate were described in Chapter 4, where we also referred to the cooperatives introduced by the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* and much praised by Bujra (1973). However, we also indicated Abou-Zeid's criticism thirty years ago of the state's failure to properly explain the ideology and goals of the cooperative movement and noted his accusation that the authorities were overly keen to please all the influential clans and important lineages and had thus encouraged them to create their own kin-based local cooperatives. Inadvertently, the new lineage-based cooperative societies reinforced the old tribal system and allowed for influential men within the lineage to take special advantage of the benefits provided through the cooperative system. Abou-Zeid strongly denounced this phenomenon, saying that the potential of the cooperative movement could only be achieved if "the authority of the chiefs, who are usually 'elected' as chairmen of the societies, is curtailed and the office is given to more able and more active persons who are really interested in promoting the activities of the societies" (Abou-Zeid nd:29).

Our concern at this point is not to question the motives, qualifications, and actions of individual leaders. Rather, we stress the more than thirty-year

coexistence of bodies that provide multiple forums in which leadership can be exercised and in which popular representation is supposed to be guaranteed, and note that a new World Bank development program in the region calls for yet another body to be created so as to guarantee community participation in planning and executing projects. The coexistence of popular councils and boards of directors of cooperative societies and perhaps community action groups to be set up by the World Bank is puzzling since the first two are judged to have not been effective except in very limited ways. Why not concentrate efforts on one body, analyze its strengths and weaknesses, and introduce changes to make it more effective?

We can only speculate, but politics and patronage are probably at work in this aspect of change in the northwest coast. That this may be so is supported by a comment about an alleged conflict among some people within the system of cooperative societies. The comment is by a university-educated young man from the Awlad 'Ali who is not involved in this particular issue. He said,

The central cooperative society is a government institution. But there is something political about it, because it takes the tribes into consideration. The various local societies send representatives to the board of directors of the central society. The recent talk about change in representation in the central board of directors is all related to an intended but undeclared change of power within the board. The leadership within the cooperatives has formal or open interests, as well as unstated secret concerns.

A tribal struggle is being played out within the system of the cooperatives. The Awlad 'Ali and the various other tribes know their weight. They reached this . . . well-known secret agreement for the division of power among them. That agreement has Sadat's signature. They will say that we do not want to quarrel all the time with elections and voting. We know our weight. The struggles take place behind the scene.

Ambiguities and contradictions that swirl around the issues of leadership and representation largely derive from the usually unstated relationship that exists between the state or state institutions and the tribal system within the northwest coast. The Egyptian state does not recognize tribes or other kin-dreds as entities with which it interacts. The state uses the language of territoriality and function. The state has *local* popular councils, not *tribal* councils. It has a *desert development* organization but no agency for the promotion of *tribal* affairs. The cooperatives the state introduced were supposed to group crop and livestock *producers* into local societies that would benefit them as *producers* and not as *Bedouin tribesmen*. In the language of the state,

one has representation on the basis of elections in which individual male and female citizens vote. One does not expect the contemporary Egyptian state to allow that representatives to state bodies be selected on the basis of consensus among elder seniors from kin-based groups such as lineages and clans.

The language of tribes and kinship is not used, but the state, in effect, has grafted important aspects of the state system onto the tribal system in the region. This grafting has not always been due to the state's neglect of the region or to feeble efforts on the part of the state to introduce its system into the northwest coast. In many instances, state officials consciously but informally recognize the social and cultural legitimacy of the tribal system and seek to build on it rather than to undermine it. Some state officials, and one in particular who has served a long career in the development of the region, are highly aware of and sensitive to the concerns of the local people and show respect for their tribal identities and kindreds.

Such sensitivity to and respect for the tribal system is laudable. However, individuals from within the tribal system can, and do, use the language of the tribes to mislead state authorities to gain individual privileges that are not passed on to their kinspeople. So-called "traditional leaders" do not always serve the best interests of their "commoner" relatives. Moreover, they often monopolize dialogue with the state and development agencies and thus deny their own relatives an effective voice in decision-making. We do not believe this to have always been the case in the northwest coast, but consider the following statement by an "ordinary" Bedouin in Marsa Matruh:

We do not put our leaders into the positions they occupy. They are selected by rotation. This time around, a man from the Qinaishat serves. Next time, it will be someone from the 'Ashaibat or the Jumi'at. While he is in office, he thinks only of what he can do for himself. He does not think much of what needs to be done for his country.

Or take the following statement by a Bedouin worker in the steppe: "New conflicts have emerged between the Bedouin, because a few fat cats have easy access to the authorities and are able to benefit from many projects. The rest of us remain poor" (quoted in Sherbiny, Cole, and Grgis 1992:26).

Comments such as these indicate the emergence of class divisions. A body of aging leaders has monopolized formal positions available locally to Bedouin. Their sons predominate among the better-educated local people. Some of these sons already begin to replace their fathers in formal leadership positions and thus provide a new leadership with more modern education, as they sustain their families' social preeminence and privileged status. Some amass considerable wealth through land sales, commercial farming and

ranching, and trade and contracting. Meanwhile a few others join such people with new wealth acquired as a result of the changing economy. All of these people assert adherence to the ideology of the social solidarity of the kindred. Yet the voices of their still poor lineage mates—almost always quiet and respectful—speak of their recognition of a new differentiation defined by economics rather than patrilineal kinship and the old Sa‘dawi and *murabit* descent statuses.

Changing Identities and Local Perceptions of Development

Old identities shared among people in the northwest coast remain. However, changes in the content or meanings they apply to their identities are ongoing and reflect changes that have taken place or that continue to unfold. New dimensions of identities also reflect their perceptions of the present situations in which they find themselves. Not surprisingly, the people of Matruh express contradictions when talking about themselves—sometimes a sense of loss but also pride in a remembered past and a strong determination to survive with dignity in a world filled with ambiguities, uncertainties, and new inequalities.

In the past, “Bedouin” and “Arab” as used in the region unambiguously denoted tribespeople with recognized claims to Arabian descent who followed the *‘urf*, engaged in nomadic agro-pastoralist production, and lived in tents. Today, the tents are gone and the old pastoralism has altered into a form of commercial ranching. Claims to Arabian descent and the *‘urf* remain, along with some dialectical distinctions and dress codes. What defines the Bedouin in the northwest coast today, especially if one considers educational and occupational change?

Take, for example, two generations of adult males from one *‘aila*, or extended family. The older generation consists of four brothers, the oldest of which was born in 1914. All four of them know how to read and write but none of them have formal school certificates. All four raise livestock and have farms. One was also a merchant and had a shop in Marsa Matruh, while another has a small trucking business. These four men have twenty-four adult sons. Seven of these sons attended university and six received their degrees, five from the University of Alexandria and one from Al-Azhar. Two majored in commerce and the others in medicine, law, sociology, and history. Four of the twenty-four sons completed secondary school and one completed the intermediate school. The remaining twelve completed primary school. Twelve of the twenty-four sons have some involvement with agriculture and herding, but these activities are a primary interest for only four

or five of them. Seven work mainly in transport and four are merchants. The remainder include a physician, the deputy director of a bank, a lawyer, a teacher, and several government employees.

The homes and most of the land these people have are located in Qasr, a few kilometers outside of Marsa Matruh. In the 1960s, this area was clearly considered part of the *badiya*, or desert, although Obermeyer recognized that even then it had a kind of in-between quality, "not quite tribal and not quite peasant," as he put it (1968:18). A young man from this extended family told us Qasr is no longer part of the desert but has become both rural (*rif*) and urban (*hadar*). Another young man from this family told us this area used to be exclusively occupied by people from one clan only, but about 25 percent of the population is now composed of people from other tribes who have moved in and settled there.

Despite changes in education, occupation, and the ruralization or urbanization of Qasr, all of these men—old and young—consider themselves and are considered by others to be Arabs and Bedouin. They are by no means unique in this regard. One of the region's leading entrepreneurs, a pharmacist by profession who regularly wears Western-style clothing, proudly, and we believe genuinely, asserts that he is Bedouin. We can provide many similar examples. By contrast, we have no examples of people with a Bedouin ancestry living in the region who deny their Bedouin ties or claim some other identity.

People are adjusting the meaning of a Bedouin identity within the context of the northwest coast. Cultural features, a sense of social solidarity, and a commitment to or at least respect for the '*urf* have replaced a way of life linked to nomadic pastoralism in the definition of Bedouin. Still, the people who share this identity express concern about a perceived threat to what they value in their way of life and say that people from among them have gone astray. Many see improvements but also mention loss or what they see as negative dimensions of the changes. An elderly senior from the Awlad 'Ali, for example, praised Khedive Abbas Hilmi II for having been the first to introduce building and development (*al-'amar*) to the region. He himself has one of the oldest and most successful new farms, and his sons are all well-educated and have achieved considerable success in "modern" occupations. However, the old man said, "Development brought us *kharab* ['destruction']." He mentioned abandoned construction sites, buildings largely unoccupied, and too heavy a dependence on goods and water from the Nile Valley. He continued,

Some things that come from outside may lead one to rebel against tradition and the '*urf*. Like the [satellite] dish and the television. Since Allah created

the world, it's been the same. Civilization begins and propels itself toward barbarism and submerges itself in barbarism. Television brings laziness. People sit and watch it, and they see the thieves and they think that being a thief is being clever. The fellahin stay up until two or three in the morning watching television. They wake up at ten or eleven. When do they go to work? The Arabs now sleep all day so they can watch the [world cup soccer] games all night.

Others complain about the evils of television but watch it regularly. Elaborating further about television, a university-educated Bedouin woman professional said,

Some people live in the serials. A lot of information comes to empty minds, and they cannot organize that information well. A girl watches a serial and thinks that she is all of a sudden in love. The boys begin to harass girls on the street. Many of those boys are Arabs. So, we have drugs, hashish, and alcohol. Powder and injections. Our customs and traditions have nothing to do with drugs or any of these kinds of things.

Many mention that money has transformed the Bedouin way of life and spoiled it. Not surprisingly, many who say this think that the wrong people have gotten too much of it. Land sales that have brought large sums of money are especially seen to threaten the Bedouin as a people. As one young Bedouin said, "Suppose someone sold a piece of land and got a lot of money for it. He may decide he doesn't have to consider the opinion of others anymore or show respect to older people." However, many genuinely express opinions that too much money has been spent in the region in frivolous ways.

Not all criticism of changes that people nonetheless enjoy is directed to outsiders. Some criticize themselves for being too quick to copy the apparent success of others without having the necessary expertise and without proper planning and feasibility studies. An educated and urbanized Bedouin is proud to be a Bedouin, holds a good job in the government sector, and often complains that the Bedouin are discriminated against and do not get good government jobs. However, this person also said that the present head of the city council is "nothing but a Bedouin" and alleged that because he is "just a Bedouin," he has done nothing for Marsa Matruh except build a wall, paid for by Qadhafi, that blocked the view of the sea.

Marriages of Bedouin men to women who are not Bedouin are also mentioned as a threat. Rapid demographic growth and increased complexity are also threats, especially for Bedouin living in Marsa Matruh. The city has con-

tinued its growth since the 1960s, as more Bedouin have moved in along with more waves of settlers from the Nile Valley. Most say that the urban Bedouin continue to respect and adhere to the '*urf*, even if they no longer dress like their cousins outside the city. However, some indicate social break down. According to an educated Bedouin woman,

The city has grown since the 1970s. People began to change, and we heard more about thefts. People do not keep their word anymore. This is shameful. Now people have to put everything down in writing. Some of the Arabs even go now and report complaints to the police. Some of them no longer have a shaikh or an '*aqila*. Or maybe the shaikh would make a peaceful settlement, and they do not want a peaceful settlement. They go to the police to add fuel to the conflict. Some people do not obey the '*aqila* anymore. Maybe his father is dead or he is the result of a mixed marriage. He has no past, no future, no present.

These kinds of changes are common to most societies undergoing rapid change. Complaints about the negative impact of television are not unique to the Bedouin in the northwest coast but are also mentioned by the Sons of the Nile Valley and many others throughout Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. This is especially the case since the recent introduction of satellite dishes that bring many foreign programs that do not conform with local norms. That some drift away from older norms of behavior is also not unique to the Bedouin but is shared with the Sons of the Nile Valley and many others in the Arab world. That some deviate does not negate the existence of an identity. A Bedouin in Marsa Matruh who goes astray does not become a Son of the Nile Valley. As one Bedouin said of another Bedouin who deviates, "He is one of us, but different."

Moreover, being a Bedouin in the northwest coast does not mean that one is not also an Egyptian. The remoteness and marginality of the past is gone. The economy always had links to the Nile Valley, but the links are much more tightly interwoven today. The figs produced in the northwest coast are marketed in Cairo, while the fodder consumed by the region's livestock is grown in the Nile Valley. The holiday-makers who descend on the region each summer are not foreigners but other Egyptians. They may be different, especially some of the upper class Cairenes, but Bedouin, villager, and urbanite now serve together in the same army and are all part of the same political system.

Some of the Bedouin in the northwest coast are sensitive to the ignorance that most of their Nile Valley compatriots usually express about them. They are annoyed that some believe they live in tents or think they are foreigners

if they do not speak in a Cairene dialect. This annoyance is shared by the Sons of the Nile Valley, who are now part of the people of Matruh. As one of the settlers said,

We have grown and changed a lot since the 1960s. Education has increased among the Bedouin and the *wafidin*. All the people of Matruh. We have doctors, engineers, lawyers, officers. All of us want to bring Matruh to the attention of others. We were not on [Egypt's] map in the past. All the nationalistic songs sing of the people from Aswan to Alexandria. They never sing of Egypt including the Western Desert. I never heard a song about Egypt from Matruh to Sinai. That needs to be changed.

Historically and geographically, the northwest coast has ties with Libya. The Libyans are fellow Arabs. When the borders are open, some of the Bedouin and Sons of the Nile Valley are drawn there for economic and commercial interests. Both peoples of the northwest coast are familiar with Libyans. But, politically, they are part of the Egyptian system. Within that system, as it currently operates in the northwest coast, some tension exists between the Bedouin and the Sons of the Nile Valley over representation in the popular councils and the People's Assembly. However, when we asked people from both segments to tell us their opinions about the achievements and failures of development in the region, they gave similar evaluations. Moreover, Bedouin and Sons of the Nile Valley in Matruh all spoke of development within the wider Egyptian context.

Bedouin and Son of the Nile Valley are both struck by all of the building along the coast and find it hard to believe that so much money and effort has been invested in buildings used for only a few weeks or so a year. According to a Bedouin,

We Egyptians are behaving like an affluent society, but we are far from affluence. All these villas. We have not reached such affluence to make this whole shore full of buildings that are not lived in.

A Son of the Nile Valley expressed much the same sentiment:

I do not know what is happening to Matruh now. People, Egyptians and Arabs from the Gulf, came here and built a lot of chalets that are occupied a month or maybe a week or five days a year. They say this is development. But people who say this are laughing at us or cheating us. Some people have so much money and they do not know what to do with their money.

People from both the Bedouin and the Sons of the Nile Valley say that beachfront development would have contributed more to the region if more hotels had been built and fewer chalets, villas, and private apartments. Hotels, they say, would employ more people and cater to more people without eating up all of the shore. People from both groups say they all benefit from the holiday-makers in one way or another, but they also say that tourism benefits only the service sector. Both speak of the need for more production. The reader will remember a young Bedouin who spoke of the need for factories to process the agricultural production of the region. A young Son of the Nile Valley said the following:

The development here has involved roads and buildings. A lot of construction. We need the roads, but the development here is not productive. If the World Bank provides money for loans, why don't they make loans available to build a factory? We want to produce. We should have a fishing industry here. We could become a great center for canning fish.

The productive sectors of the economy are limited to crop and livestock production, and these activities are predominantly in the hands of Bedouin. But a Bedouin also commented that,

Matruh is not an agricultural society. Our agriculture is not very much because it is dependent on the rain. Herding is perhaps better, but even that faces problems. When there is drought, we have to bring fodder from the Nile Valley.

Although they are not engaged in either crop or livestock production, Sons of the Nile Valley in Matruh express much the same point of view. They, unlike many of their compatriots in the Nile Valley, tend to believe that livestock production is the better economic strategy for the region. On the other hand, they are like their Bedouin friends from the northwest coast. One Son of the Nile Valley said, "Livestock are best, but where are the range lands today?" Another said, "It all depends on the rain. Sometimes it rains; sometimes it doesn't." Both Bedouin and Son of the Nile Valley hope, or dream, that oil in commercial quantities will be found in the region. A more realistic assessment is that of a young Bedouin: "Water is already costly and may be more costly than oil in the future. We cannot waste it and survive."

The northwest coast, a part of desert Egypt, has a beautiful sea and beautiful sands. "These were not made by us," an old 'aqila said. He felt they have not been used properly. He lamented that the fish resources have not been exploited. He praised the figs and olives from Burj al-'Arab to Sallum

but noted the lack of a good processing and marketing system. He remarked on the contributions of the *Ta'amir as-Sahari* but said the government has not paid enough attention to developing the wealth of the region. He remembered the Greeks who used to bring merchandise from Alexandria by boat before the railroad was completed in 1928. He did not forget the sheep or the camels. He said, "We are optimistic." Development started fairly late, only in the 1960s. "Before that we had colonialism and we had military rule. We have only had local government since 1959," the wise old man said.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusions

We presented conclusions in the previous chapter concerning important issues raised in this work: about land and how its owned and not owned; about customary law and its uses in ways that are not a part of custom; about traditional leaders and how their positions derive not so much from tradition as from modernity in the forms of the state, development programs, and cooperative societies; and about changes in identity and other social constructs, including class. These topics, individually and taken together, constitute essences of one of the main conclusions we draw from what we heard and saw in the northwest coast. That conclusion is: There has been change, sometimes radical change threatening survival; but elements from the past also remain and are used—in newly-altered ways—to make statements about or to interpret the present, and also to organize aspects of social life in what has become a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world for the people of Matruh.

Also, the people with whom we spoke informed us about a vast amount of change that we conclude to be specific to their region but also not unique when compared with transformation in similar areas within the wider Arab world. The range of the northwest coast has long witnessed population movements into and out of the region in ways that strongly evoke population movements in centuries past within the arid range areas and oasis farm-lands and communities of desert Arabia, greater Syria, and Iraq. Of direct relevance to the contemporary people of Matruh is one specific movement of people out of eastern Libya sometime in the eighteenth century. That movement, by no means the first of its kind, displaced the Hanadi into other parts of Egypt and brought the Awlad ‘Ali back into a region they now share with the Jumi‘at and other Bedouin.

A hundred and more years ago, Greeks, Sudanese, and others from nearby Arab territories outside of Egypt arrived as traders, as members of the state’s camel corps (*hajana*), or as Brethren (*Ikhwan*) of the Sanusiya Islamic movement. The First World War brought masses of British troops to battle against a few Arab Muslim warriors of resistance. Colonial administration under British-led coast and border guards followed. By the 1920s,

small numbers of Egyptians from the Nile Valley arrived in the area as workers and employees, and some settled in the new town of Marsa Matruh and other centers. Such changes from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are not unique to the northwest coast, as people in other desert territories from Arab Mauritania to Arab Syria suffered colonial military administration, engaged in expanded trade activities, and were involved to at least some degree in Islamic movements—including the Wahhabiya, the Mahdiya, the Tijaniya, as well as the Sanusiya and others.

The Second World War was a modern disaster for the ancient Arab range of the northwest coast and for the people who lived there. Italian, German, and British armies fought a massive tank battle at 'Alamain, cut down trees, poisoned wells and cisterns, sowed the land with mines, destroyed buildings and tents, confiscated and killed animals, and displaced the region's people to a purgatory of existence in makeshift camps in the Nile Valley. The Second World War also brought modern warfare to most of the rest of North Africa. Moreover, the war effort triggered significant desertification in Syria, where much of the arid range was plowed up and began to blow away—the result of a vain attempt to cultivate an Arab steppe with wheat to make bread for foreign armies fighting a war that did not directly concern the Arabs (Masri 1991).

The creation of the Jewish state in Palestine, in a sense, is also a result of the Second World War; and the effects of that event still reverberate not just at the level of Arab state politics but among "ordinary" people in "remote" areas like the northwest coast. The people of Matruh have lost sons in the Israeli-Arab wars, and they have received war refugees from Sinai and the Suez Canal region into their communities. Meanwhile land in the northwest coast provides space for military bases and areas for war games that, at least partially, are linked to the state of belligerency resulting from the creation of the Israeli state and from its actions in another Arab region.

Yet the Bedouin and Nile Valley settlers in Matruh initiated a process of cultural rebirth after the war fifty or so years ago. They built on foundations laid down in the past: a long history of state-tribe relations; a railroad; and markets centered in Alexandria and Bahaira in Egypt and in Tubruk and other towns in Libya. The Bedouin braved the foreign land mines to scavenge the debris of war. They made use of some of the items they collected but sold most of the debris to traders, and then used the money they received to buy a few head of sheep or goats. Long recognized by the Bedouin as a form of capital (*ras mal*), the herds began their natural reproduction and growth, and within a few years livestock-raising was back on its feet. The old nomadic pastoralist way of life of these Bedouin would seem to have been reborn.

However, the disaster the Second World War brought and the rebuilding that followed it triggered other changes. Experiences during their forced displacement from the region and from the selling of war debris opened new horizons for the youth, and many never returned to the old way of life. Extended family households increasingly spared a couple of sons or grandsons to work as traders or for wages, and these supported their families with cash remittances sent back from Libya or from Alexandria and other places in the Nile Valley. Monetization of the economy accelerated, and reliance on multiple sources of income became a strategy followed by most of the region's Bedouin households. In the 1950s, some people still grew barley and consumed much of it as food; they consumed the milk of their animals and used some of their wool, but the sale of live animals raised on the range became a predominant feature in the region's economy not too long after the end of the war.

Certainly, the disaster that the northwest coast and its people experienced is one of the specificities that characterizes the region. The war and its aftermath are part of the oral history people of Matruh often recount. The shared experience of Bedouin and settler is powerfully recalled: "People from the Nile Valley died here on this land right next to the Bedouin, both killed by the same German or English bombs . . . They faced forced migration, also together . . . And they returned here, also together." Thus is expressed an aspect of identity, of a shared identity that transcends the (sub)cultural border between Arab Bedouin and Egyptian Son of the Nile Valley. But the war that brought foreign armies to fight each other on the land of the Awlad 'Ali and others in Matruh, how unique was it? Was it not just an extraordinarily violent, and thus dramatic, example of the outside forces that the "civilized" and "modern" Europeans had previously brought to most of the Arab world and beyond through their own particular invented forms of colonial rule, economic exploitation, and cultural dominance? And does it not also constitute one dimension of the contemporary world system or of the globalization that continues today under the patronage and protection—or, according to the Ferneas (1997:538), the "patriarchy"—of the United States?

Change in the northwest coast quickened, and also altered, during the 1960s. That decade brought significant institution-building. A civilian local government system, the general desert development organization, local agricultural cooperative societies and a central cooperative society, and units of the state's official political party were all introduced into the region and were largely incorporated into the local scene—after significant indigenizing in some instances. These institutions continue to be of central importance in the region in the 1990s, although recent structural adjustment and privatiza-

tion programs have initiated changes that have weakened some of them. Nonetheless, these are the institutions that have guided the purposive changes consciously initiated to contribute to "development" in and for the region.

These development-oriented changes from the decade of the 1960s included new and expanded schooling and public health care services, sedentarization and new housing programs, modest tourism development, public assistance for new crop production, and the provision and distribution of subsidized fodder from outside the region. Meanwhile new jobs were created in the region, and significant occupational change began. Migration into Marsa Matruh and other urban centers by settlers from the Nile Valley grew rapidly, while younger Bedouin from the region increasingly migrated for waged labor and other income-generating opportunities (including smuggling) in Libya and in Alexandria and other Nile Valley communities.

We have already called attention, in Chapter 4, to the comparative perspectives from the wider Arab world that are relevant to the region's experience of the nomad sedentarization process. Yet most of the other changes that started up at this time in the northwest coast were simultaneously underway in most of the rest of the Arab world. Abou-Zeid (1979) has cogently noted the similarities between the urban development of Marsa Matruh and that of the small city of Aswan during the same period. To cite but only one other example, our joint research in 'Unayzah, Saudi Arabia, documents a strikingly similar pattern from the late 1950s to the early 1970s of new institutions, new services, migration, occupational change, and the beginnings of new agriculture (Altorki and Cole 1989:85-116; 1997). We concluded that changes from this period in 'Unayzah constituted *substantive* development, in the sense of widely-shared improvements in the quality of life that were potentially sustainable. Changes from the 1960s in the northwest coast, in our estimation, also marked *substantive* development.

Changes during the 1970s and 1980s built on the development of the 1960s and were also influenced by the transformation brought about by the 1974-1982 oil-price boom in Arabia and Libya. Changing political relations between Egypt and those two areas also influenced the northwest coast, most notably in impacts on the region's export of livestock resulting from the closing of the Egyptian-Libyan border and the reestablishment of good relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia around the time of the Sixth of October 1973 War. During this period completion of the transformation from nomadic pastoralism to Bedouin ranching occurred. We presented in Chapter 5 comparative perspectives from Libya, Syria, and Saudi Arabia to indicate that this aspect of change in Matruh is part of a wider Arab world transformation. The old kin-ordered nomadic pastoralist production system

of the past may appear to have been replicated after the war and to have basically survived even the sedentarization of the nomads. However, new elements dominate livestock-raising in the northwest coast, and these elements parallel the transformation among traditional crop producers who are seen to have changed from being peasants to becoming farmers and farm workers—and are also often dependent on non-farm sources of income (for Sudanese and Egyptian examples, see Bernal 1991 and Hopkins 1993, respectively).

The northwest coast's transformation in livestock-raising incorporates changes introduced by development programs, especially fodder from outside the region and public assistance for the development and expansion of cisterns and other water resources. Otherwise, the new system was largely fashioned by the Bedouin themselves without external financial or technical aid. Although the ideology of the old kin-ordered system continues, most of the livestock-related factors of production have been commercialized, along with the implied individualization of relations among actors engaged in the new system. Thus the provision of fodder from outside the region and that acquired from others within the region is fully commercial, as is the process of fattening livestock for the market and, of course, all sales and transport of livestock, whether for export or for consumption within Egypt's national markets.

Labor is increasingly commercialized, as shepherds are now hired for wages and no longer contracted for payment in kind; but considerable amounts of work related to herding are provided by unpaid family members, usually sons and daughters. Access to pastures on the open range increasingly involves payment of rental fees to individuals who assert (informal) ownership of the pasture areas; but formal demarcation, formal ownership, and fencing of such areas do not, or do not yet, exist.

Because the labor and land factors of production are only partially commoditized, we call the new system *Bedouin* ranching. The Bedouin raising livestock out on the range is, and in some sense always has been, a capitalist. Yet the Bedouin capitalist rancher at the end of the twentieth century usually runs a small- or medium-scale operation, is both constrained and supported by family and kin, and is dependent on the rain. This rancher raises animals for sale and buys most of the family's food; but some of the animals are given to others as prestations to resolve a dispute and at the times of birth, circumcision, marriage, return from the holy pilgrimage, and death. This rancher also conceives of these animals as not just commodities for sale but as also constituting a heritage from a harsh but noble past and thus an element of the person's identity. For such reasons, this rancher is also a Bedouin.

Crop cultivation we show to have always been an integral part of the production system in the northwest coast. Moreover, this study documents the existence in the past of a complex non-market system of exchange of food items among people in the coastal steppe and people in the ancient agricultural oasis of Siwa. However, new crops introduced into the region during the twentieth century and especially from the 1960s onward do not build on the region's previously existing crop production but are innovations that have mainly been introduced by the external agencies of the state and of the United Nations and other foreign aid development programs. The new crops, unlike the region's old barley production, are not integrated with livestock-raising at the level of farm operations—although many individuals engage in both activities and use income from one to finance expansion of the other.

The new cultivation is associated with impressive construction of water-harvesting infrastructure in the region's wadis. This infrastructure strives to replicate an ancient system, the ruins of which are visible in the region—although almost nothing is known about the system or when or why it collapsed. Meanwhile achievements made in the production of new crops, mainly olives and figs, are compromised by the failure to create appropriate processing and marketing facilities or to provide adequate and appropriate agricultural extension services. Success in terms of new production along with failure to consider what happens to the produce once it leaves the farm is a situation we found to also be the case in 'Unayzah (Cole and Altorki 1993).

The most recent severe and prolonged drought the northwest coast has encountered was in the early 1950s. Thus the new olive and fig trees have yet to withstand three or four years of no rain. No special plans have been made for such an event; and one wonders whether they would survive, although some say the dew would be enough to keep them alive. At any rate, one may conclude that although figs and olives are adapted to arid climates, their introduction in the northwest coast has been more the result of Nile Valley and foreign (Euro-American) prejudice in favor of crop production as a sign of agricultural development than of any systematic ecological research on the region—which historically seems clearly to have favored pastoralist production.

Concerning holiday-makers, the title of this book is somewhat misleading. We have relatively little specifically to say about this category of people, except that those who come to the northwest coast are mainly Egyptians from urban places in the Nile Valley, and they also include some other Arabs and a few foreign tourists. Among the Egyptian holiday-makers are members of the country's elites and of its upper-middle and middle classes, along

with many people from lower-income groups. An anthropology-of-tourism concern about how the culture of the "hosts" is affected by contact with the culture of the "guests" is not an issue of concern in the northwest coast. The foreign tourists with significantly different cultures are very few and have almost no impact on what takes place on the coast, although this would not be the case for other tourist areas in Egypt. The social and cultural differences of importance in the holiday-making scenes of the northwest coast are those of class and of other internal divisions among people who are participants in the same general society and culture. Thus the main sociocultural tension in northwest coast holiday-making exists among the holiday-makers themselves—between the popular (*sha'abi*) and the elite "styles"—rather than between the holiday-maker and the local Bedouin and settlers.

The main concern the local people of Matruh have about holiday-making in their region is does it contribute to the local economy? The results of this study show that local people do benefit, although benefits are not widely shared within the local communities. People of Matruh do work in this sector and also invest in it, but significant numbers of workers and a major portion of the investment come from outside the region. Meanwhile land sales associated with the new tourism development have accentuated local class differences and triggered conflicts. Land expropriations have also fueled a sense of insecurity among some of the local people—with implications for national politics.

The loss of land, whether through sale or expropriation, translates into the loss of a component of identity for those who held the land as an element of patrimonial heritage and thus threatens the sociocultural existence of a people. In this sense, the culture of the local people is affected by tourism development, but indirectly as an exogenous process of economic change and not as the result of a foreign culture brought into the area by visitors. Conversion of the beachfront into holiday resorts, usually behind walls, also results in a loss of access to the beach for all but a few. Additionally, the new resorts result in the loss of ecologically-defined habitats that were formerly productive with crops and pasture.

Thus holiday-makers in the northwest coast are important in the context of this study because their presence calls attention to a major dimension of the transformation that has occurred in the region. We conclude that the tourism development of the 1950s and 1960s in Marsa Matruh was moderate and also constituted a positive and probably sustainable contribution to urban development in the region. However, the rapid expansion of building along the seashore since the mid-1980s is, in our estimation, more a result of Egypt's general desert development boom than part of a *substantive* development process—either of the beachfront for the benefit of the local region

or of the local holiday-making dimension of the field of tourism in Egypt-at-large.

Looking at the region of the northwest coast generally since the 1970s and 1980s, we note that improvements in physical standards of living and infrastructure abound. The population grows rapidly through natural increase and migration. Social life is ever more complex. Economic links project outward to more and more distant markets. The presence of the state increases its visibility. Islam reaffirms its multiple roles in people's lives and is most easily seen in a high rate of local participation in holy pilgrimage to Makka—an indirect but strong indicator of the financial resources that many people of Matruh have been able to amass and also of the vastly improved transportation network that links the area to the world beyond.

However, inequities exist in standards of living and the distribution of physical and social infrastructure. Population growth threatens crowding and consequent impoverishment on the fragile arid range. Widening economic links are constricted by a proliferation of small-scale farm, ranch, trade, and other enterprises that absorb family labor and have great survival value but all too often lack the organization and contacts needed to derive maximum exchange value for their workers and owners. Meanwhile some increasingly large-scale enterprises threaten to dominate the region's many small-scale organizations, perhaps leading to their extinction. Shortages of Nile water, regional drought, water erosion, and topsoil blowing away threaten land degradation and eventual desertification.

Many of the sons and some of the daughters of the people of Matruh obtain modern education, including degrees from Alexandria University and other institutes of higher learning. However, at the end of the twentieth century many of the region's people have little or no access to schools, and modern health care within the Arab range is seriously deficient. Yet vast amounts of capital have been expended to build beachfront villages for elite summer holiday-makers, while Marsa Matruh provides hotels, apartments, and camps for a few elite visitors and many lower-income people, who escape crowded conditions in the Nile Valley for a brief respite on the small desert city's crowded beaches.

Can we conclude that the many changes this study records add up to development? Despite the existence of disparities, we stress that we observed much that we consider to be highly positive. However, if development is defined as an integrated, sustainable process of incremental change leading to high physical standards of living; cultural, social, and psychological well-being for the wide majority of local people; and their effective participation in political decision-making, then the transformation long underway in the northwest coast is not development.

Certainly, the northwest coast has experienced its fair share of formal, state-sponsored "development" programs and projects. The region currently experiences a strong dose of private business-driven "development," especially in the tourism and holiday-making field but also and increasingly in the export-oriented livestock sector. Moreover, one can argue with justification that the "incremental," "integrated," and "sustainable" dimensions used to define change as development are little more than slogans. As such, they constitute elements of a concept of change derived more from nineteenth century Euro-American theories of unilineal evolution and the notion of progress than from empirical on-the-ground reality among people.

Perhaps the uneven and imbalanced dimensions of empirical change in the northwest coast are nothing more than inevitable bumps on a long road leading from "tradition" to "modernity." Some scholars see the Arab world as currently in a state of *transition* from one steady-state in the past ("tradition") to another steady-state in the future ("modernity"). However, we do not see the past as steady-state "tradition" or the future as some well-ordered local version of "secular modernism." The so-called transition is not a stage like adolescence to be overcome but simply the present filled with echoes of the past.

Some scholars and others write of the *assimilation* of "marginal" peoples to a hegemonic center or dominant (sub)culture. In Egypt it is widely considered that successful peasants become urbanized. Successful Nubians are those who become integrated into urban Egypt and cease being different from mainstream Nile Valley Egyptians—except perhaps in some folkloric ways and inevitably because of their skin color. Awlad 'Ali seniors certainly do not think of themselves as "marginal;" and they do not see themselves as assimilating or becoming something else. To the contrary, our data confirm the efforts of both Bedouin and settler in Matruh to adjust valued aspects of old lifeways to new circumstances without losing their old identities. People from both categories show determination to fashion a future that accords with their heritages but also incorporates innovation from the outside and, through their own agency, from within.

When we leave Marsa Matruh and drive across the steppe on the excellent four-lane highway "built by Qadhafi," we usually have mixed feelings. We remember the simple dignity of many of the people we have met—both Bedouin and settlers. There is the pride and the enthusiasm many of them exude when they talk about themselves, their society, their culture. Yet as we speed along the highway we can not help but notice those "silent, concrete structures" that block our view of the sea. They trouble us—not because they block our view of what is, in fact, a beautiful sea—but because, to us, they symbolize land speculation, a rush to build, a boom economy. Such fea-

tures brought about a truncation of substantive development in 'Unayzah. Egypt, of course, is not Saudi Arabia; and the resorts are not only examples of excess. However, we conclude like some of the people of Matruh that much of the luxury there is exorbitant (for a poor country like Egypt). And there is the waste, so many unfinished buildings—not to mention the many finished ones that are not used.

We argued in Chapter 1 on the deserts and desert development in Egypt that Nile Valley Egypt is exploding out of its ancient narrow confines and pushes farther and farther out into the desert. Nile Valley Egypt increasingly engulfs the northwest coast, such that some of the people of Matruh begin to speak of themselves as "becoming a minority here in our own region." They do not mean to challenge the rights of Nile Valley Egyptians to visit, to work, and to live in this part of the country. Yet they fear a system that they perceive excludes them from effective participation in decision-making about the present and future course of their communities and region. This is probably not unique to Matruh but is also the case in much of Upper Egypt and elsewhere in the country. However, despite obvious examples of new development and major expansion within the deserts of Egypt, many Egyptians continue to use an old cliché that holds that only 3.5 percent of Egypt's territory (the Nile valley and delta) is inhabited. The rest is empty desert. Yet from this study we have learned that the old cliché is a serious misrepresentation of reality. This other part of the country is certainly inhabited, and even crowded—given its specific environmental circumstances.

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

'aila Family; extended family; (maximal) lineage.

'ailat Plural of *'aila*.

'alim Man of religious learning.

'amar Building; construction; development.

'aqila Wise man, especially adept at dispute settlement.

'awaqil Plural of *'aqila*.

badiya Bedouin; steppe; desert.

bait House; household; (minimal) lineage.

biyut Plural of *bait*.

carretta Cart (Italian), pulled by a donkey and typical “taxi-cab” in Marsa Matruh.

dabiha (Sacrificial) slaughter.

dawla State.

diyya Bloodwealth.

galabiya Gown. Traditional apparel for men and women in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world.

ghinnawa Songs. A type of poetry.

hadar Urban; sedentary.

hajana Camel corps.

'Id al-'Adha Muslim Feast of the Sacrifice.

'Id al-Fitr Muslim feast after the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

ikititab “Adoption.”

Ikhwan Brethren; Brotherhood.

'izab Plural of *'izba*.

'izba Settlement; farm; estate.

jumla Trust; partnership.

kalala A system of trade in which the trader buys “the fruit on the tree” and then collects the produce at the time of harvest.

komisiongi Broker; auctioneer.

ma'mur Police chief.

markiz District.

mi'ad Sitting, where disputes are formally aired and resolved according to customary law.

<i>mulk</i>	Ownership; private property.
<i>murabit</i>	Tied. Refers to a person categorized according to a particular descent status.
<i>murabitin</i>	Plural of <i>murabit</i> .
<i>mustafin</i>	(Local) holiday-makers.
<i>nizala</i>	Refuge; protection. A right under customary law to grant refuge for up to a year to a kin group involved in a murder or other serious assault.
<i>qaba'il</i>	Plural of <i>qabila</i> .
<i>qabila</i>	Clan; tribe.
<i>raghata</i>	Reciprocal labor party.
<i>ras mal</i>	Capital.
<i>sadaqa</i>	Friendship; (trading) partnership.
<i>sadiq</i>	Friend; (trading) partner.
<i>sadud</i>	Dams; dikes.
<i>samn</i>	Ghee.
<i>sawani</i>	A type of water well; underground galleries with water.
<i>sha'abi</i>	Popular; of the people; "lower class."
<i>sultani</i>	A type of (high quality) fig.
<i>suq</i>	Market; marketplace.
<i>suwah</i>	(Foreign or Arab) tourist.
<i>Ta'amir as-Sahari</i>	Egypt's general desert development organization.
<i>tarahil</i>	Migrant rural laborers.
<i>tasdir</i>	Export.
<i>tashir</i>	Desertification.
<i>'ulama'</i>	Plural of ' <i>alim</i> '.
<i>'umda</i>	Headman, or "mayor," of a village; by extension, a leader among the Bedouin.
<i>'urf</i>	Customary law.
<i>wad' yad</i>	Claim to ownership of land through rights of usufruct; "squatter's right."
<i>wafidin</i>	Migrants.
<i>wali</i>	Governor.
<i>wilaya</i>	Province.
<i>zawiya</i>	(Religious) lodge.

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Based on anthropological fieldwork, this book describes, analyzes, and interprets change and development in the desert northwest coastal region of Egypt. Focusing on the region's change and development as experienced and as described by Bedouin and by settlers from the Nile Valley and Delta, this book presents issues from the perspectives of the local people, including their evaluations and assessments of the area's transformation. Oral histories and commentaries about their involvement in the region's transformation since the early nineteenth century are central features of the work.

The study also draws on a wide range of comparative data to show that change in this particular region is linked to and shares much with that underway in other parts of Egypt and the wider Arab world. Issues that are especially stressed include land ownership and its relation to social identity; local leadership; local government and cooperative societies; impacts of tourism development in the regional economy, society, and culture; and privatization and perceived strengths and weaknesses of markets as they operate in the northwest coast.

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